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The Nascent Reggaetón Scene in South Korea: Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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The Nascent Reggaetón Scene in South Korea: Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract

The Nascent Reggaetón Scene in South Korea: Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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This work is an exploratory investigation into the origins and implications of the current reggaetón scene in South Korea. I provide historical background by tracing the course of Latin music there beginning with the Korean War in the 1950s. The postwar presence of the U.S. Army, and particularly of Puerto Rican soldiers, in the country has facilitated the dissemination of Latin music at the grassroots level. More recently, nightclubs in Seoul play reggaetón as they cater to a new generation of young Korean and Latinx cosmopolitans. The role of Korean immigrants from Latin America has and continues to be central in creating a space for the music. I interpret this aspect of Latin music's popularization as a "counter-hegemonic" form of globalization. I take a closer look at the phenomenon in South Korea through online and offline fieldwork as well as autoethnography, focusing on class, identity formation, and gender/race stereotypes. I argue that Korean reggaetón listeners come from a higher socioeconomic class. Further, many Korean fans associate the music with their experiences abroad and the new forms of self-expression it has facilitated. Regarding gender and race, YouTube content analysis

reveals that reggaetón videos reinforce the “South American woman” stereotype, even as feminists approach their sexist and hyper-masculine content more critically. I suggest that we should expand the regionalist horizons of reggaetón literature as it gains global popularity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Changing social relations are acted out on the dance floor" (Fairley 2009, 290-291)

The global success of Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee's reggaetón song "Despacito,"[1] the first predominantly Spanish-language song to claim No.1 on Billboard's Hot 100 in twenty-one years and currently the most-watched video on YouTube,[2] attracted new audiences to Latin repertoire outside America and Europe. Although reggaetón, a hybrid form of Latin American, Caribbean and African American music with Spanish-language lyrics, has been on the rise since the late 1990s, it is enjoying international popularity now more than ever. Inspired by Jan Fairley's quote above and as a Korean reggaetón fan myself,[3] in this work I will examine the current reggaetón scene in South Korea and its history. My research starts from asking broad questions regarding the genre such as: Who are the stakeholders of this scene? How does globalization transform the ways in which Latin music is disseminated and consumed? What are the socio-cultural implications of the reggaetón boom in a completely distinct culture? How does it influence perceptions of Latin Americans on the part of international audiences? And finally,

[1] There is controversy over what the right spelling should be for the name of the genre: reggaetón, reggaeton, or reguetón. To strictly follow the Spanish orthographic system, the term would have to be written as "reguetón" as it is pronounced. The Academia Puertorriqueña de la Lengua Española has also announced its plan to propose an entry on "reguetón" to the next edition of the Real Academia Española dictionary (R. Z. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez 2009). Coelho (n.d.) explains that the word "reguetón" has its origin in Panama in the 1980s when it was coined to refer to a genre which emerged from the mixture of reggae and hip hop. "Reggaetón," however, is a linguistically hybrid form that respects the original English word "reggae" and adds a Spanish suffix "-tón" to it. "Reggaeton" is the unaccented form of the word, which fits better in English orthography. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez (2009) touch on the issue of orthography and conclude that they prefer "reggaeton" because it best embodies the music's transnational and multilingual character. In this paper, however, I will use "reggaetón" in order to acknowledge both the genre's prominent characteristic which is hybridity and transnationality, and the "reassertion of cultural and national specificity" (Flores 2009, xi) that is clearly represented through the accent.

[2] The music video of "Despacito" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJQP7kiw5Fk) was uploaded on YouTube on 12 January 2017. It was the first video to hit the 3-billion-views mark, and eventually the 4, 5, and 6-billion-views marks as well (Fernandez 2019). It is still the most-watched video as of 26 April 2019.

[3] "Korean(s)" in the paper refers to South Korean(s), unless otherwise indicated. Country names will always be specified as South Korea or North Korea.

how is reggaetón being appropriated and reinvented in other regions in ways that inform the self-perception of listeners? I argue that globalization has allowed diverse participants to bring reggaetón to and enjoy it in South Korea. This geographical dislocation, however, significantly erases the genre's associations with class, which is reflected in its new audience composition. And while the music provides Koreans with new possibilities to craft self-identity, its lyrics and visual images reinforce existing stereotypes of Latin Americans and Latinxs for Koreans.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research. First, I define reggaetón and explain why studying its trajectory and influence in South Korea is important. I review literature on reggaetón focusing on its history and politics on gender, race, class, and identity. Lastly, I describe my methodology.

Defining Reggaetón

Reggaetón is a relatively new genre that emerged in the late 1990s. Before its nascence, the genre was simply called "underground" in Puerto Rico. In terms of its musical origins, some scholars argue that reggaetón developed through the musical exchange among four locations: Panama, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and New York (R. Z. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez 2009). Although the commercial genre was mainly shaped and transformed within Puerto Rico, it was influenced by many Caribbean music styles as well as different forms of hip hop from its inception. Originating in Puerto Rico, the music is predominantly sung in Spanish. Currently, Puerto Rico and Colombia produce most of the reggaetón music consumed globally (Buskirk 2017).

Reggaetón is also characterized by and often associated with dance moves called *perreo.* *Perreo* is a style of erotic dance choreography that imitates dogs' mating. With the verb ending '–(e)ar,' *perrear* means to dance "doggie-style." Both the noun and verb derive from the word *perro*, which means dog. The *perreo* dance style also seems to derive from Jamaican dancehall and choreographies associated with that repertoire. The majority of Korean audiences do not know the term or the exact dance style that it refers to. However, they consider the dance moves accompanying reggaetón extremely sexual.

Significance of the Study

Despite the growing interest in reggaetón as a subject of academic inquiry, there has been little research that reveals how the cultural politics of the genre are reproduced in contexts where Latinxs or Latin Americans are complete outsiders: in this case, South Korea.[4] Although the genre's surging popularity in Cuba has received scholarly attention beginning in the late 2000s (Baker 2009, 2011; Boudreault-Fournier 2008; Fairley 2006, 2009; Torres 2012), that island belongs to the Spanish Caribbean which is geographically, linguistically, and thus culturally adjacent to the commercial birthplace of reggaetón. Some publications have investigated (trans)local identity and the race dynamics surrounding reggaetón in the Dominican Republic and Miami (Davila 2009; Hernandez 2009). However, no region outside of the Americas and the Caribbean is recognized in existing scholarly literature. Certainly, the music has flourished in the Americas, but we live in a time when K-pop idol groups hold concerts in Latin America, Latinxs

[4] South Korea is a homogeneous country: 96.6% of its population is ethnically Korean (Kim and Nam 2015). Koreans historically have had few opportunities to examine issues of race and ethnicity, which has led to a xenophobic society with little knowledge of or tolerance for other races. The severity of the "racial illiteracy" of the country is proved by a UN racism expert's urging that South Korea needs to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law (OHCHR 2014).

are K-pop's second biggest fan base in the U.S. after Asian Americans (Hodoyan-Gastelum 2016),[5] and Latin dances are more widely accepted as a hobby in South Korea. While the K-pop phenomenon in Latin America has gained scholarly attention over the last few years, little is known about the reverse phenomenon: the popularity of Latin music in South Korea. American media have analyzed and raved about reggaetón as a cross-cultural global phenomenon since 2017;[6] it is about time that we expanded the horizons of our research and gained insights into different cultures through the lens of reggaetón.

Literature Review

I mainly discuss reggaetón literature in order to provide information about the historical development of the genre and to contextualize its reception by Koreans. Understanding the genre's roots, trajectory, and the issues surrounding it helps situate my research and identify its scholarly contributions. Then I explore some prominent topics in reggaetón literature such as issues of gender, race, class, and identity.

Emergence and Trajectory of Reggaetón

As a means of discussing the various issues that reggaetón has been associated with in disciplines such as Latin American Studies, American Studies, Popular Music Studies,

[5] Latinxs is the plural form of Latinx, a gender-neutral term used in lieu of Latino or Latina (referencing Latin American cultural or racial identity). I use Latinx in the paper for purposes of gender inclusivity.

[6] According to Leila Cobo, Billboard's Executive Director of Latin Content, there were five Spanish songs on the Billboard Hot 100 in 2016. In 2017, there were 19, which is unprecedented. She added that she does not think that phenomena could have happened without streaming (Adams 2018). As multimedia streaming services (e.g. Spotify, Apple music, and YouTube) have enhanced accessibility to culturally and geographically distant music, and nowadays fans are spread all over the world. On Spotify, the biggest music streaming app accounting for 36 percent of streaming music subscribers worldwide (Statista 2018), the original and remix of "Despacito" had over 1.4 billion streams within about eight months of its release of the song in January 2017. Spotify described this surprising fact as evidence of a global "Despacito" phenomenon (Buskirk 2017).

Musicology & Ethnomusicology, Sociology, and Anthropology, I would like to start by comparing what reggaetón stands for now in popular music culture and how scholars have discussed the genre's roots. Reggaetón seems to be one of the most common cultural denominators for Latinx and Latin American youth inside and outside of the U.S. today. That is to say, the music has come to function as a language of pan-Latin solidarity. For instance, Don Omar's "Reggaeton Latino" (2007) sounds like a claim for the ownership of reggaetón and its *Latinidad*.[7] The singer declares such sentiment by exclaiming "el reggaetón Latino" ten times in the song's lyrics and exhorting audiences to "feel the power of Latin reggaetón" (originally "*sienten el poder del reggaetón latino*"). This tendency of *reggaetoneros* to support an agenda of pan-Latin solidarity is evident in more recent songs as well (Exposito 2018).[8] By contrast, reggaetón scholars tend to focus on the music's hybrid nature. From the origins of the genre to its multiple aesthetic manifestations, they suggest that reggaetón embodies the notion of hybridity, and that any claims that the music represents a single group should be viewed skeptically.

It is important to address how hybrid the origins of reggaetón are. Tracing back to its musical roots, scholars note that the genre is partially Panamanian, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, and Nuyorican because a number of different genres have influenced it such as salsa, plena, bomba, reggae, hip hop, and even electronica. In the book *Reggaeton*, different essays put various regions at the center of the reggaetón narrative. Deborah Pacini Hernandez sheds light on the contributions of Dominicans to the genre. She argues that the visibility of Dominicans in the discourse surrounding reggaetón has been muted by historic tensions between Puerto Ricans and

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[7] Don Omar is a Puerto Rican reggaetón singer who is also referred to as *El Rey*, "The King (of reggaetón)." *Latinidad* is a Spanish-language term that can be translated as Latinness in English. It refers to the various attributes shared by Latin Americans.

[8] *Reggaetonero* is a neologism for a reggaetón musician or singer.

Dominicans in a manner similar to the way that Puerto Ricans were erased from histories of hip hop by African Americans. Other essays place more importance on Panama as the cradle of reggaetón by looking at the emergence of *reggae en español* (a form of Jamaican dancehall reggae with Spanish lyrics) in that country. Wayne Marshall argues that the origins of reggaetón can be best understood by the triangular transnational movement of music and people between New York, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico because reggaetón emerged as the local interpretation of rap and reggae in Puerto Rico.

While many authors analyze the influence of genres originally external to Puerto Rico as musical contributors to reggaetón, the documentary film *La Clave* views reggaetón as an extension of and a successor to salsa music on the island. Through interviews with major Puerto Rican musicians, artists, and producers of reggaetón and salsa, the film argues that the two hybrid genres (salsa and reggaetón) are merely different representations of the same rhythmical framework associated with *clave*.[9] Even though not every reggaetón artist would agree, some artists on the island are aware of the issue and foreground *clave*. Puerto Rican salsa singer Domingo Quiñónez contends that salsa and reggaetón are similar by equating the "*tumbao*"[10] of salsa and the "flow" of reggaetón. Tego Calderón, a Puerto Rican rapper and one of the best-known reggaetón artists, also attests to the close musical relation between salsa, reggaetón, and rap: "I always write in *clave* even though it is a rap" (Sosa 2013). The similarities between the two genres are also tied to the social, political, and historical contexts they developed in, which can best be described by the words *underground* or *calle* (street).

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[9] The *clave* is a key rhythmic pattern in Afro-Cuban music as well as in other African diaspora music. It is the temporal organization of a variety of genres such as salsa, rumba, son, mambo, Afro-Cuban jazz, reggae, dancehall, reggaetón, and the like.

[10] *Tumbao* is the basic rhythm played on the bass in salsa music. The same term can be used to describe the rhythm of the congas, the piano, or the overall sound of the band.

Underground is one of the terms used to describe precursors to commercial reggaetón music heard in Puerto Rico during the 1990s (R. Z. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez 2009). The reason why such music was called underground is because it was produced, distributed, and consumed without any corporate sponsor, and with no representation in the mainstream media. Also, underground music was performed and enjoyed by people from marginal socioeconomic backgrounds and in *caseríos*, the Spanish slang term meaning "public housing projects" or "the hood."

In 1995, DJ Nelson, a Puerto Rican DJ who played a significant role in the development and popularization of the new music, invented the name 'reggaetón' for his own album (Sosa 2013; *Urban Flow Show* 2011). The term reggaetón thus emerged in the late 1990s in Puerto Rico; it crossed over into the U.S. mainstream market and public consciousness in 2004, a decade after its initial emergence. Daddy Yankee's megahit "Gasolina" initiated the trend toward broader acceptance. However, like many other commercial genres, reggaetón music began to lose its initial "real and crude" appeal and became more danceable and romantic in the aftermath (Sosa 2013). About a decade after its initial penetration into the U.S. mainstream (in 2017), "Despacito" took the genre to another level by attracting audiences from around the world.

Some recent changes and trends in reggaetón, however, have yet to be studied: (1) the multilingualization of lyrics and (2) the localization of the music, i.e. its accommodation into culture communities beyond Puerto Rico and changes in its style and meanings as a result. I expect both trends to continue into the future. Regarding lyrics, early reggaetón songs used to be performed exclusively by Spanish-speaking artists and sung entirely in Spanish. However, as the genre entered the U.S. mainstream market, English-speaking hip hop artists and Spanish-

speaking reggaetón artists began to collaborate. Some of the first hip hop and reggaetón crossovers include "Gangsta Zone" (2005) by Daddy Yankee and Snoop Dogg, "Conteo" (2006) by Don Omar and Juelz Santana, and "Oye Mi Canto" (2005) by N.O.R.E., Daddy Yankee, and other featured artists. Such crossover production has become more common, or more accurately, more visible and impactful over time. Examples abound. Not only did Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee's "Despacito" (released in January 2017) gain popularity worldwide after the release of its bilingual remix version featuring Justin Bieber, but another global reggaetón hit song followed: J-Balvin's "Mi Gente" (released in September 2017). The latter had Spanish and French lyrics because it was produced by French DJ Willy William. "Mi Gente" later included English lyrics as well in the remix version featuring Beyoncé. Reggaetón is rapidly bridging the gap between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking or other artists, thereby diminishing the musical distance between Spanish-language pop and global pop.

Such amalgams in reggaetón are not limited to the scope of language: the genre's musical fusion goes beyond the mainstream U.S. or even the Americas. Reggaetón is now frequently being mixed with genres such as trap,[11] EDM (Electronic Dance Music), salsa, bachata, cumbia, and many more. Marshall (2009) notes that hybrid offshoots as *salsaton*, *bachaton*, *cumbiaton*, *chutney-ton*, *raï-ggaeton,* and *bhangraton* suggest further localizations. Indeed, *bhangraton*, a Latin-Indian fusion genre that was described in 2009 as "yet to go beyond reggaetón remixes of

[11] Trap is a style of hip hop that was developed in the late 1990s to early 2000s in the Southern United States, especially Atlanta. Trap music is characterized by its bleak lyrics that talk about hardships in urban life such as poverty and violence. The genre's name is a literal reference to its humble roots: the drug or trap houses where people can get trapped. Musically, trap is characterized by "a lazy-sounding vocal style, samples from a Roland TR-808 Drum Machine, triplet hi-hats, and snapping kicks and snare" (Van Dusen 2018).

bhangra[12] or Bollywood tracks (and vice-versa)" (Marshall 2009, 76), was featured by Indian-American musician Giju John in his music video "Más Bhangraton" in 2015. Another branch of reggaetón called moombahton was created by American DJ Dave Nada in Washington, D.C., in 2009. Moombahton is a fusion of house music, a style called "dirty Dutch" in particular, and reggaetón.[13] It has already generated new local adaptations by DJs in the U.S., Netherlands, and Mexico (Marshall 2010).

Adding to the discussion of the aforementioned localized subgenres of reggaetón, I would like to focus on a more recent phenomenon: its penetration into South Korea. Although not concrete enough to have a distinct subgenre label, the footprint of reggaetón in K-pop[14] has been discussed extensively in online communities among international K-pop fans.[15] As K-pop is securing more and more Latinx and Latin American fans, a number of videos associating

[12] Bhangra is a genre of upbeat popular music originating in the Punjab region in the northern part of India and is popular with the Punjabi diaspora in Europe and North America.

[13] The name "moombahton" is a portmanteau of Moombah and reggaetón. Marshall (2010) on his personal blog (wayneandwax.com) describes the birth of the genre as follows: "Afrojack's remix of Silvio Ecomo & Chuckie's "Moombah" – a typical example of Dutch "dirty house" – already had all the elements of a reggaetón club banger: thumping kick drums, piercing synth-lines, cut-and-paste party chants, and a distinctly Caribbean cross-rhythm in the snares. The only problem was that it was too fast. To make the track fit the vibe of the gathering, Nada reduced its speed by 20 beats per minute. This simple adaptation sent the kids into a frenzy."

[14] K-pop is a genre of music from South Korea which distinguishes itself from Western pop music in various ways. It is not easy to define the genre musically because K-pop means Korean popular music. However, the most representative K-pop songs are performed by Korean idol groups. Some of the main characteristics of K-pop songs include the verse-chorus-bridge structure, short to medium in length, easy incorporation of other styles, little live instrumentation, focus on image and dance, among others (Stachniak 2015).

[15] Although their nationalities are difficult to verify, international K-pop fans have demonstrated interest in the K-pop's musical fusion with reggaetón. The administrator of FarEastVibes, an online forum that tries to create a one-stop shop for Asian and Asian-American entertainment with a focus on indie music, posted about the Korean girl group FIESTAR's song that has elements of reggaetón under the title of "Kpop Just Went Reggaeton. No Joke" (FarEastAdmin 2012). The song is produced by a renowned Korean hip hop rapper Tiger JK and based on dembow rhythms which characterize reggaetón music. A lot of YouTube comments on the song note its similarity to reggaetón music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=27&v=mGZ0rj4vF5E. Another online community which gathers people around the East Asian countries' entertainment, OneHallyu, had a conversation on the topic as well ("Is This the Beginning of a Dancehall/Reggaeton-Ish Trend in Kpop - Music" 2016). The thread of comments shows both excitement and frustration of non-Korean, presumably Latinx, K-pop fans at the reggaetón's influence on K-pop. Some are excited to find the cultural influence of their own roots in K-pop, but others lament that reggaetón ruins K-pop's own unique charm.

reggaetón and K-pop have been uploaded on YouTube.[16] Even though most of them simply juxtapose reggaetón with K-pop music videos, the enthusiasm among foreign K-pop fans in consuming elements of reggaetón seems to already have impacted mainstream K-pop production. The K-pop boy group GOT7, for instance, released its 3rd mini album in Japan on 30 January 2019 which includes a reggaetón remix of the album's title song "I Won't Let You Go." Another popular K-pop girl group TWICE's song "Three Times a Day" mixes elements of reggaetón and moombahton based on the Roland TR-808 rhythm (Naver Music 2017).[17] Within Latin America, the Colombian reggaetón artist Maluma has also expressed strong interest in collaborating with a K-pop idol group BTS (El Comercio 2018). These cases demonstrate the ongoing fusion of reggaetón, and Asian music genres will continue to challenge or extend the linguistic, musical, and cultural frontiers of the music even further. Admittedly, K-pop fusions are very recent phenomena. Nevertheless, the documentation of these new tendencies supports existing scholarly literature by creating an ever more complete description of how the genre is expanding. Furthermore, it provides insights into the not only musical but also sociocultural needs of South Korean youth.

Gender Politics and Sexuality

A look at reggaetón music videos makes it self-evident that the genre is one of the more hypermasculine and male-dominated in contemporary popular music. Hypermasculinity and the

[16] "SI EL KPOP FUERA REGGAETON" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bqtKj_BcRM), "BTS x Spanish Music [aka reggaeton]" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CodbUDzqDg), and "Reggaeton Coreano Vol.3" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-3lXyjJ95E&list=PLzMxw3vGkWB0ZZcTbgQsIbFMT13TYjxiV) are some of the examples.

[17] The Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer is an iconic drum machine that has played a critical role in the history of hip hop ever since it was introduced by the Roland Corporation in 1980 (Hasnain 2017).

sexualization of women in reggaetón music videos have been defining characteristics of the genre. Thus, no discussion of reggaetón would be complete without an analysis of gender politics and sexuality. Naturally, reggaetón music has predecessors in the region that represent women and men in similar ways. Women's representations in other Caribbean popular music, for instance bachata, calypso, dancehall, and Latin rap, have been studied by others (e.g. Manuel 1998, 2006; Hernandez 1990; Aparicio 2010; Smith 2004). Manuel (1998) points out the asymmetrical power relations in Caribbean popular music cultures, with males dominating the fields of performance, the personnel of the industry, and most aspects of the larger social, political, and economic structures. He also argues that even as women try to find meaning, dignity, diversion, and self-expression in these popular music cultures, they are conditioned to do so largely within the existing parameters. In the same vein, drawing from U.S. hip hop feminist research as a frame of reference for understanding, Báez (2006) examines gender and feminist articulations in reggaetón through the case study of Ivy Queen.[18] She suggests that Ivy Queen, one prominent artist bringing attention to Puerto Rican gender politics in reggaetón, "straddles a tenuous space in which her hybrid subjectivity is complex and at times seemingly contradictory" (66). The author points out that while Ivy Queen commits to feminist issues in her lyrics and claims a cultural belonging to the male-dominated genre, her physical aesthetics have shifted in a way that contradicts the lyrics—during her early career she used to dress like a tomboy and now she conforms to norms for female artists by wearing a hyper-sexual dress. This aligns with Manuel's argument that the female agency in Caribbean popular music industry is constrained and compromised by male-dominant gender constructs.

[18] Ivy Queen was the most popular Puerto Rican female reggaetón artist at the time and is still often referred to as the "Queen of Reggaetón."

On the contrary, other scholars suggest reggaetón's possibilities to empower women and challenge the existing male-centered narrative. For instance, Jiménez (2009) takes a different perspective in interpreting the agency and position of Ivy Queen in reggaetón. Through analyzing song lyrics and career of Glory,[19] the author describes her early success in reggaetón as "the chorus girl with sexy voice" and her peripheral, if not invisible, position throughout her career. By contrast, Jiménez characterizes Ivy Queen as a woman who marketed herself as "a maverick, bold spirit possessing the lure of the unreachable" in the male-dominated industry and translated her hyper-feminine aesthetics—such as long nails—into a weapon. Similarly, contrary to the general claim that reggaetón reinforces and normalizes exaggerated masculinity, Nieves Moreno (2009) argues that it also provides opportunities to criticize hypermasculinity in Puerto Rico. By analyzing Calle13's song lyrics and performances,[20] the author demonstrates how the band suggests new representations of masculinity. In this way, existing studies allow us to see the nuanced and multi-sided picture of the reggaetón's gender politics.

It is curious that little research exists on the compositions and videos of more widely known artists such as Daddy Yankee and Don Omar. They are central contributors to the mainstreaming of reggaetón in the U.S. and thus must have had more impact on public gender imagery. As opposed to the lack of research on reggaetón music videos, various disciplines such as Education, Black Studies, and Media Studies have dealt extensively with women's representations in hip hop music videos, using various forms of analysis: the influence of music

[19] Glory is a Puerto Rican female reggaetón artist whose coquettish vocals intoned the refrain of Daddy Yankee's "Gasolina" and Don Omar's "Dale, Don, Dale." In their songs, Glory sings the "response" or "chorus" whereas male artists sing the lead vocal line within the call-and-response or verse-chorus form. Glory attempted to become an independent reggaetón artist after her debut in reggaetón career as a sexy chorus singer, but never became as successful as Ivy Queen (Jiménez 2009).

[20] Calle 13 is a Puerto Rican band that once played reggaetón. Nieves Moreno (2009) shows how they consistently made fun of the typical hypermasculine imagery of the men depicted in the genre.

videos on the sexual attitudes of students, attempts to redefine black womanhood, and media literacy art education on sexism (Hobson and Bartlow 2008; Kistler and Lee 2009; Chung 2007). Considering the close relationship between hip hop and reggaetón as well as the importance of visual components in music consumption these days, more research needs to be done on the perception and influence of reggaetón's music videos.

Some existing research focuses on how reggaetón's hyper-sexualization of women was publicly condemned and later accepted by champions of women's rights in Puerto Rico. Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera (2007) include an anecdote about female senator Velda González who led public hearings aimed at regulating reggaetón. The senator chastised the music's dirty lyrics, its music videos in which girls danced virtually naked, and *perreo*. Rivera-Rideau (2015) asserts that the senator's criticisms reproduced problematic stereotypes of black female hypersexuality. Even though reggaetón was attacked as obscene and immoral by many groups, the widespread commercial success of Puerto Rican reggaetón basically ended the war against the genre on the island. However, Puerto Rico was not the only country that saw reggaetón as problematic. Tellingly, the genre's sexual transgressiveness has been one of the motivations underlying its censorship or public outcry over its popularization in other countries such as Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Malaysia (Bedford 2012; Biddle 2011; Torres 2012; Vivero 2017; AP 2006; AFP 2017).

Fairley (2006, 2009) enriches the academic discussion on gender politics and sexuality in reggaetón by analyzing the meaning of dance moves and geographically extending the conversation to Cuba. She interprets the implications of a new dance move and corresponding

song lyrics in Reana's "A ti te gustan los yumas."[21] Fairley suggests that the new solo female dance style uses women's bodies as a major asset, as a form of "convertible currency" (2006, 472) associated with the Cuban tourist dollar economy. Adopting a historical lens, she further asserts that reggaetón dance moves in Cuba represent an extension of transgressive dance in many other parts of Latin America, and that they reproduce the narrative that the role of women is to serve men's needs. When adopted in new social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, she believes that reggaetón tends to be "localized" in terms of the way people appropriate and/or interpret its lyrics or dance moves. So far, there has been little research on the local encounters of the music internationally in this sense, which would undoubtedly provide insights into many forms of societal tension and change. Encounters with reggaetón in South Korea are particularly interesting in that the controversial genre is being adopted in a country with conservative ideas about sexuality. Many of these traditional ideas are in conflict with a younger generation's more liberal and Westernized values. The ways that reggaetón provides a vehicle for enacting social tensions and changing views about sexuality in South Korea will be discussed later.

Race, Class, and Identity

> "Music *embodies* political values and experiences, and *organizes* our response to society as political thought and action." (Street 2011, 1)

If reggaetón is looked at from Street's perspective, it is charged with racialized and class-related meanings. It has been a place where race and class are embodied, negotiated, and

[21] The song title means "You like foreigners." In Cuba, *yuma* is the street slang which refers to a "foreigner" (Fairley 2006). However, the song's origin seems unclear. There are YouTube videos of the song with different titles such as "A mí me gustan los yumas" and "Yunai yunai a tit e gustan los yumas." Unlike Fairley's claim, many videos identify the song's original artist as Calle 35.

appropriated. Reggaetón literature does justice to the importance of this topic; studies have looked at the genre as a space for expressing "race-based cultural politics" (Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez 2009, 9), mainly revolving around how blackness and *Latinidad* are represented, asserted, or negotiated at particular times (Rivera-Rideau 2015; Rudolph 2011; P. R. Rivera 2011; R. Z. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez 2009; Kattari 2006). A review of these publications demonstrates how reggaetón has promoted multiple manifestations of racial and ethnic identities, and how it has become a site of racial politics.

Influenced by at least four geographic locations (Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Panama, and New York), reggaetón is hybrid in all ways, and thus it cannot be inherently monoracial or monoethnic. Scholars have attempted to tease out how some artists use reggaetón to represent singular groups nevertheless, and why. Kattari (2006) argues that promoters of reggaetón strategically utilized salsa as a commercial model of "a hybrid pan-Latino symbol of identity" (43) to gain popularity with a pan-Latin audience, thereby focusing on issues that the entire diasporic community would find relevant. Kattari believes that reggaetón artists often attempt to create a unified Latinx group consciousness, especially for Latinx youth in the United States. However, she leaves out the ways that blackness has been excluded in the development of such a commercial discourse. R.Z. Rivera, Marshall, and Hernandez (2009), on the other hand, state that one of the biggest reasons reggaetón has been valued by fans and devalued by critics in the circum-Caribbean and New York is "the genre's defiant embrace of blackness and its insistent connections to hip hop's and reggae's race-based cultural politics" (9). Embracing both positions, Marshall (2009) offers a more comprehensive account of the music's racial politics by

tracing back how the genre has been transformed from *música negra* (black music) or *melaza* (molasses, dark sugar syrup) to "reggaetón Latino" over time.

Whereas Marshall considers the shift from a discourse of blackness to one of *Latinidad* as a linear process of development, Rudolph (2011) and Rivera (2011) discuss the complex but intimate coexistence of blackness and *Latinidad* in reggaetón through case studies. Rudolph's essay explores the ways that black masculinity and material culture become markers of *Latinidad* through Don Omar's music and career. After pointing out that Don Omar has built his image via both transnational black pride and *Latinidad*, she goes on to argue that both discourses represent a response to the subjugation of minorities within dominant, Eurocentric society. In a similar vein, Rivera analyzes how reggaetón artist Notch's music video of "Qué te pica" unsettles certain distinctions between blackness and *Latinidad* and establishes connections between Latinx and Caribbean communities in the United States while still incorporating stereotypes of black hypermasculinity. Blackness and *Latinidad* are clearly central elements to the discourse surrounding reggaetón.

Rivera-Rideau's book *Remixing Reggaetón: The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico* (2015) advances discussion of the genre by contextualizing it within Puerto Rico's hegemonic discourse of "racial democracy." The author asserts that the idea that Puerto Ricans live in racial harmony is a myth because working-class, urban, and nonwhite communities have been subject to racism and the persistent devaluation of blackness. On the island, these communities have been associated with reggaetón performance. Rivera-Rideau argues that Puerto Rican elites perceived the new visibility of blackness through reggaetón as a threat, which explains the Drugs

and Vice Control Bureau's confiscation of "underground" cassettes and CDs in 1995.[22] The alleged reason for this police action was the "obscenity" of the lyrics, but Rivera-Rideau maintains that the close associations between the music and underground or working-class black communities led to exacerbated tensions. Similarly, she frames the Anti-Pornography Campaign initiated by Senator Velda González in 2002 as an attempt to secure racial hierarchy in the face of reggaetón's performances of blackness.[23] These studies demonstrate that reggaetón performance can be viewed as a battlefield involving racialized, gendered, and class identities.

In spite of the wealth of academic interest in reggaetón's cultural politics of race and class, most publications focus exclusively on the music's primary countries of origin. The intent of my research is to broaden the ways through which race and class are analyzed through reggaetón. Rivera-Rideau (2015) argues that the genre's blackness was left out as it made its way into the U.S. market because commercial radio programs categorized it as *Hurban* (a neologism for Hispanic and urban). What does this process look like in South Korea? How do Koreans interpret the visual cues surrounding reggaetón (as seen in music videos, for instance) in terms of race and ethnicity? It appears that while Korean audiences notice blackness through reggaetón's musical resemblances to hip hop, they do not associate blackness with Latin America.

Methodology

The constructivist paradigm informs my study because it attempts to construct reality from the researcher's and participants' subjective views. Constructivist beliefs posit that

[22] As mentioned earlier, "underground" is considered to be the precursor of reggaetón.

[23] Senator Velda González led public hearings in 2002 to regulate reggaetón's lyrics and *perreo*. She chastised reggaetón for its obscene lyrics and videos, and argued that *perreo* triggers factor for criminal acts (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007).

individuals hold different views and form their own realities, and thus that the job of researcher is to uncover them (Creswell 2015). I assume a relativist ontological position. In other words, I believe that "the world consists of multiple individual realities influenced by context" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis 2006). My research evaluates personal impressions, experiences, and stories of the researcher and the participants as it develops major themes. Similarly, within the constructivist paradigm, researchers analyze participants' views as they conduct inductive ground-up (from practice to theory) research (Creswell 2015). In terms of the rhetoric, the constructivist approach uses a personal language when discussing research because it enriches the result of data analysis.

Methodological framework

This study uses grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a methodological framework. Rather than approaching the data with pre-existing theories and concepts, grounded theory allows researchers to begin by collecting data, engaging in open-ended analysis of it, creating larger themes from these data, and finally linking them together in a larger story (Tracy 2012). Such processes of data collection and analysis happen iteratively, concurrently, and inductively. I also pursue an emic approach as an insider in order to understand views and behaviors of participants. Kottak (2007) states that the emic approach helps us understand how local people imagine the world, perceive things, and categorize their meanings and rules. The emic approach is particularly adequate for this research because of my positionality discussed in the next section.

Within the framework of grounded theory, the study adopts secondary research and ethnography as overarching methods. I conduct secondary-source research to trace the trajectory of Latin music in South Korea back to the 1950s. The corresponding first half of Chapter 2 draws on archival data: books, articles, interview transcripts, white papers, etc. I use ethnography as a principal method for the rest of the paper. I attempt to deliver the stories of Korean reggaetón audiences, and to draw meaning from them. As Jago (1996, 495) notes, "Storytelling is fundamental to human experience. Through narration, we make meaning out of experience." And ethnography is about telling stories (Murthy 2008). In order to be able to analyze a wider range of people and gain credibility, I divide my ethnographic research into three categories: offline or on-site ethnography, online or digital ethnography, and autoethnography.

For offline ethnography, the study adopts participant observation and in-depth interview. I immerse myself in the field by building rapport with subjects, making friends, going to performance sites, and talking to regulars. The participant observation method is indispensable in grasping the picture of the emerging reggaetón scene in South Korea insofar as it enables exploratory and interpretative research (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). Achieving similar goals, the in-depth interview method is characterized by open-ended questions, semi-structured formats, and efforts to seek understanding and interpretation (Guion, Diehl, and McDonald 2001).

My online ethnographic work draws on content analysis of reggaetón reaction videos on YouTube uploaded by Koreans. Reaction videos refer to videos showing the emotional reactions of people viewing television series episodes or film trailers. These resources provide valuable data because Koreans' reaction to reggaetón music videos reveal information about their

reception of images associated with the genre. I explore the impact of reggaetón music videos on Koreans' perception of Latin Americans through content analysis of this nature. The method allows me to examine patterns in communication and analyze patterns of reception.

Lastly, I incorporate autoethnography based on the consideration of my positionality as a young Korean female reggaetón fan. The method uses tenets of ethnography and autobiography (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). Such an approach "lets you use yourself to get to culture" (Pelias 2003, 372), and thus connect the personal to the cultural. Since I myself am motivated to conduct research and share many of my interviewees' experiences, I choose to use self-reflection as a tool for this research. I explore wider sociocultural meanings of the subject of study through writing my anecdotes.

Positionality

Positionality is defined as "[t]he occupation or adoption of a particular position in relation to others, usually with reference to issues of culture, ethnicity, or gender."[24] It is important to delineate my own position in the study so as to shed light on two things: 1) the power dynamics that might exist between me and subjects, which in turn might affect the breadth and depth of the data I can collect; and 2) the influence that my subjectivity might have on the interpretation and analysis of data. I belong to the group of people I work with and I identify with them. I am a Korean heterosexual woman in her 20s who was born and raised in South Korea. I identify myself as Korean because I spent more than 20 years of my life in South Korea

[24] *Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v.* "positionality," accessed April 7, 2019, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/positionality

and received college education there. I believe that my cultural, ethnic, and gender occupation helps me elucidate the relationship between reggaetón and Korean audiences.

I provide details about my personal values, assumptions, and biases here because the study adopts a constructivist worldview. I share my background since it influences my worldview as well as the way I gather and interpret data. I majored in Hispanic Language and Literature and minored in Latin American Studies at Seoul National University. During those years, I spent some time in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries as an exchange student, a traveler, and an intern. I lived in Mexico for one year and in Uruguay for half a year. I have visited Spain, Portugal, Guatemala, Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. I developed a fondness for Latin music genres including reggaetón while living in Latin America. These experiences will enhance my understanding of study participants and their experiences. However, I am also aware of the internal assumptions and biases I might have as a member of the community and thus, will strive to remain objective.

Participants and sampling methods

Although there are various groups of Koreans who listen to reggaetón in varied settings and for different reasons, I focus my on-site ethnographic research on Korean youth in nightclubs. I define "youth" as people in their 20s or 30s based on the typical demographics of night clubs in Seoul, and of Korean YouTubers who post reggaetón reaction videos. I used two qualitative sampling methods to find reggaetón fans in Seoul: snowball sampling and purposeful sampling. Initially, I recruited a couple of interviewees through personal contacts. Following these interviews, snowball sampling or chain referral sampling helped me find more participants:

the first interviewees referred their friends, and they referred their friends. I also used purposeful sampling which involves selecting participants based on pre-selected criteria derived from the research questions. The criteria include nationality and familiarity with reggaetón by trade. Since I had to observe and interview reggaetón fans in Seoul, I recruited more people at field sites where they are likely to be found. I interviewed thirteen people without taking into account the people I informally talked to at field sites.

Data collection and analysis

Site selection. My criteria for site selection are 1) any venues that included reggaetón on the playlist, 2) vibrant nightlife settings such as bars and nightclubs, and 3) spaces with relatively young crowds. I was already familiar with two Latin music-friendly nightclubs in Seoul: Mike's Cabin and Bulldog. I did a keyword search on Google and Instagram to find more fieldwork sites. As a result of the search, I visited two other clubs: CatchMe and Dolce Vita.

Participant observation. I conducted participant observation at the four sites and used the Notes app on iPhone to write down fieldnotes instead of a physical notepad. I took this approach 1) for convenience, and 2) to prevent the obvious presence of a researcher from influencing social interactions. I reviewed fieldnotes at the stage of data analysis and will only share the ones relevant to recurring themes in the paper.

In-depth interviews. As I mentioned, I used an open-ended and semi-structured style of interviewing in order to give agency to interviewees and encourage storytelling. The interviewees consist of Korean audience members and DJs, all recruited through the sampling techniques explained above. I did nine in-person interviews, two phone interviews, and two text

interviews. Each in-person interview lasted from 20 minutes to an hour. I used the Voice Memos app on iPhone to record interviews and replayed them for data analysis. I only transcribed relevant quotes while coding them into different categories.

Content analysis. As case studies, I selected reaction videos to "Despacito" because it helped popularize reggaetón in South Korea and because it was the most-watched YouTube video globally as of April 2019. I searched for videos with the keyword "Korean Despacito reaction" and picked the top three videos for closer scrutiny as case studies. I ruled the first one out because it featured a K-pop idol group's reaction. I transcribed all text in the videos including non-verbal language—laughs, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Transcriptions were analyzed along with iterative watching so as not to miss the gestural components of participants' reactions.

Limitations

There are three limitations to this preliminary examination of the perceptions and experiences of Korean reggaetón listeners. The first limitation is time. The number of interviewees is limited to 13 subjects because of the time constraints involved in interviewing and data analysis. The second limitation concerns the subjectivity of interpretation associated with inhomogeneous YouTube contents. Pace (2008) points out that the stories that a YouTube video can tell are so varied that it may be difficult for the researcher to reach a focused interpretation. I also recognize that YouTubers might react in an exaggerated fashion in order to score higher view counts or attract more subscribers. The last limitation involves a possible skewed population. The overall selection of interviewees could be skewed or not representative of the overall Korean population due to the process of snowball sampling. Since my research

began by interviewing a couple of individuals who are either students or alumni of the university that is considered most prestigious in South Korea, the interviewees' educational and economic backgrounds are not necessarily typical of the overall Korean population. Nevertheless, I believe that the data I have compiled provides important insights into the local dance music scene.

Chapter Outline

The body of my thesis is divided into two chapters, each touching on different aspects of reggaetón analysis. In Chapter 2, I trace the trajectory of Latin music's presence on the Korean peninsula from the 1950s to recent years by means of archival data and interviews. Examining this history, I identify and categorize catalysts to globalization that contributed to Latin music's popularization there. I draw parallels between the 1950s, the initial period under consideration, and the 21st century. Chapter 3 examines the intersections of reggaetón and Korean audiences in terms of class, identity, and gender. Drawing largely on my own experiences and interview data, I demonstrate how the genre has different implications on the new audience group vis-à-vis Spanish-speaking counterpart, such that listeners are composed of higher socioeconomic classes. Finally, I argue that they use reggaetón to imagine themselves as well as their Latin Others.

Chapter 2: Globalization and Latin Music

This chapter traces the presence of Latin music in South Korea beginning with the Korean War of the 1950s and continuing into the 21st century. I have chosen to focus on the 1950s and the 21st century because they are two particularly important moments that mark the physical and digital introduction of Latin music to South Korea. To begin, I define some of the terms and theories used in my analysis. Next, I examine the early presence of Latinxs in South Korea through archival data. The final section moves on to recent decades and focuses more on the stories of individuals and sites of interaction, as recalled through my own experiences and the memories of interviewees. I divide this chapter into discrete segments and time periods for various reasons. First, the unending Korean War serves as the backdrop of the reggaetón scene today; the presence of Latin music in South Korea would be far less vibrant if it had not been for the presence of U.S. soldiers on the peninsula. Second, a simultaneously historical and contemporary focus helps us interpret the dissemination of Latin music in South Korea within broader processes of globalization: 1) from hegemonic to counter-hegemonic and 2) from macro to micro. The chapter attempts to answer the following questions: "How does globalization transform the ways in which music is disseminated and consumed?" and "Who are the stakeholders of the South Korean reggaetón scene?" I argue that the Korean War facilitated both macro- and micro-level globalization that has continually introduced new forms of Latin music into South Korea. The 1950s has reverberations in the present, affecting the South Korean sociocultural landscape. Even in the 21st century, as new media technology influences the influx

of reggaetón into South Korea, I argue that individuals who have been able to travel internationally with the help of globalization play a central role in the reggaetón scene in Seoul.

Terms and Definitions

This paper explores the notions of 1) hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization and 2) macro- and micro-globalization, which will be explained in the following paragraphs. I define how both types of globalization can be used to evaluate the presence of Latin music in South Korea. Since the Korean War has been a trigger in this musical migration, I briefly review literature that delves into the connection between war and globalization. Lastly, I define cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitans, as they are a critical audience for reggaetón in Seoul.

I want to begin by acknowledging conflicting definitions of the term *globalization* in order to prevent its acritical use. While Kelly (1999), for example, frames globalization as a political discourse with neoliberal associations, Robertson (1990) supports a rather apolitical use of the term to describe any phenomenon that influences or is intended to influence the entire world (Turino 2003). Although Robertson's view is arguably too broad, Kelly's definition of globalization is also insufficient to explain the pervasiveness of Latin music in South Korea. The process of globalization there is so multifaceted that it is only partially explained by unidirectional power relationships.

Needless to say, the need for critical distance in studying globalization has also been raised by scholars (e.g., Tsing 2000). Within Ethnomusicology, critical engagement with the concept is demonstrated in some works beginning in the early 1990s, largely manifest through viewpoints evaluating music within the global order. Rooted in postcolonial critique, Erlmann

(1996, 1999) describes a colonial global imagination that mystifies the West's violent exploitation of the rest, the non-Western world (Stokes 2004). In the same vein, the neoliberal globalization has been challenged by anti-hegemonic and anti-globalization responses from the global south. In contrast, Slobin is reluctant to build a systematic theoretical language. He looks at the local as the site of resistance, self-fashioning, and transformation (Stokes 2004). Interestingly, data gathered through the interviews with Korean DJs and fans suggest that the process of introduction, diffusion, and consumption of Latin music in South Korea from the post-World War II era to the present has elements that correspond to both Erlmann's and Slobin's views.

Even though emerging powers such as China or India are transforming the dynamics of globalization in military, political, economic, religious, and cultural terms, Western interests, values, and lifestyles have long dominated international markets, media, and even cultural or national identities. This imbalance of power throughout the process of "hegemonic" and "neoliberal" globalization instills pro-Western ideas into local populations and cultures (especially in developing nations), which is likely to force people to assimilate to the Western culture. Such trends are reflected in how the military, diplomatic, and economic relationship between the United States and South Korea has affected the development of Korean popular music since mid-20th century.

A variety of movements have emerged to challenge contemporary hegemonic and neoliberal forms of globalization: "alter-globalization," "anti-globalization," "anti-systemic movements," and so on (Evans 2012). Evans (2000) calls this set of counter-movements "counter-hegemonic globalization" and describes them as forms of "globalization from below."

Counter-hegemonic globalization movements challenge systems of domination, which is what neoliberal globalization is based on. Additionally, they utilize elements of globalization as a means to fight against hegemonic forces by empowering the local. Though not a political phenomenon, bottom-up globalization is observed in the way that reggaetón is being shared and popularized in South Korea, mainly through the efforts of Latin American and Korean cosmopolitan youth.

Macro-level globalist issues usually deal with nation, society, and globe whereas micro-level analysis focuses on individuals, families, and small groups. I again categorize globalization into macro and micro with a view to highlight two levels of globalization that impact the dissemination of Latin music during the Korean War. Admittedly, there has been a debate and criticism around the macro-micro link in sociology (Squazzoni 2008). While I do not intend to make a reductionist argument, I decided to foreground the macro-micro dichotomy because it allows me to clearly flesh out the relationships that have led to the rise of Latin music in South Korea.

One facet of globalization that is most relevant to this research is the advancement of transportation, communication, and information technology. Technological advances facilitate cultural exchange and assimilation both physically and virtually. By making international travel accessible to a wider population, the revolution in transportation has allowed individuals and their music to cross borders more easily and frequently. The development of multimedia streaming services has recently been enabling an even broader dissemination of music without requiring physical travel. This paper attempts to shed light on what globalization does to music and people as well as what they do with globalization.

It is impossible to see the whole picture of the emerging reggaetón scene in South Korea without discussing the interwoven relationship between music, war, and globalization. The Korean War (1950-1953),[25] by dividing the Korean peninsula, created cultural and social discontinuity between traditional pre-war Korea and contemporary post-war Korea. It was without a doubt one of the most important events in the modern Korean history and it has brought about many radical changes, one aspect of them being musical. I incorporate this discussion because both my own fieldwork and secondary sources point to the direct and indirect impact of the war on the Latin music scene.

In evaluating the current Latin music scene in South Korea, it is imperative to turn to the influence that the Korean War has had on contemporary Korean society. Barkawi (2006)'s book *Globalization and War* discusses the relationship between war and globalization, which provides the foundation for my discussion: "War is not only an example of globalization, it is one of the principal mechanisms of globalization, a globalizing force" (92). War is one of the most definite examples of globalization because wars on a global scale such as World War I and World War II were not feasible until the 20th century. Furthermore, though it is not conducted in a humane way, war brings about massive exchanges of people and cultures. Emphasizing that the term "globalizing force" does not necessarily have a positive connotation, I argue that the Korean War and U.S. troops stationed in South Korea have been particularly critical in creating "global encounters."

[25] The Korean War was a war between North Korea and South Korea, which broke out on 25 June 1950. It is also referred to as "625" reflecting the date of its onset. As a casualty of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, Korea has been split into two sovereign states—North Korea under the influence of the Soviet Union and South Korea under that of the United States—since the ceasefire agreement of the war on 27 July 1953.

According to White's definition, "global encounter" refers to "situations in which individuals from radically different traditions or worldviews come into contact and interact with one another based on limited information about one another's values, resources, and intentions" (2011, 6). Latin America is one of the most geographically distant places on the planet from South Korea, and the two regions have had no direct colonial encounters, so it would be no exaggeration to say that Koreans have drastically different traditions and worldviews from Latin Americans.[26] Thus, the encounter between these two regions, peoples, and cultures is global and radical. White (2011, 6) points out that there has been little scholarship "on the actual encounters that bring people of different musical or cultural backgrounds together or the ways that these encounters condition musical practice and knowledge about the world." My thesis attempts to fill this gap by examining what is called Latin music in South Korea, especially reggaetón, and its Korean listeners.

The term *cosmopolitan* derives from the Greek word *kosmopolitês*, meaning 'citizen of the world.' The Cynics and later the Stoics first used this term "to identify people as belonging to two distinct communities: the local and the wider 'common' " (Delanty and Močnik 2018). In contrast to this general understanding of cosmopolitanism, Delanty and Močnik (2018) note that the concept has developed different applications, each having their own definition. Cosmopolitanism can be a moral, ethical, political, and cultural ideology and a means of viewing the world. In this paper, I adopt the initial usage of the term by the Cynics and the Stoics—the notion of people belonging to two distinct communities—in my reference to cosmopolitans. I will use this term solely as expressed in cultural phenomena, lifestyles, and identities "as a

[26] Here, the generic use of the word 'Latin America' or 'Latin American' is not to lump together various cultures and values that exist in Latin American countries. Also, the intention is not to dilute the British Caribbean origins of reggaetón, but to reflect most of Koreans' ignorant perceptions of Latin America.

normative viewpoint from which one experiences, understands, and judges the world" (Delanty and Močnik 2018).

Cosmopolitan is an important concept for purposes of my analysis in that the commonality among the people I identify as stakeholders in the reggaetón scene in Seoul—Latinx students and globetrotters, Korean immigrants from Latin America, and Korean elite youth cosmopolitans—can all be described as "cosmopolitan." They are contributing to or have built the foundation for the current reggaetón scene in South Korea. Most of the people I interviewed or observed in fieldwork belong not only to the local but also to the wider "common." Here I suggest more specific definitions of cosmopolitans so as to help understanding who they are. John Urry (1995, 167) states that cosmopolitans adopt "an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent experiences from different national cultures," which is applicable to all of my subjects of study. Scruton's slightly different definition of cosmopolitan describes some of my interviewees even more precisely: "the cosmopolitan is often seen as a kind of parasite, who depends upon the quotidian lives of others to create the various local flavours and identities in which he dabbles" (2007, 146). However, I find the parasitic metaphor excessive. A cosmopolitan does not always exploit the host's resources to feed itself. It is also worth considering how cosmopolitans view cultural identity. Kleingeld and Brown (2014) suggest that contemporary cosmopolitans believe that a person's cultural identity should not be defined by "any bounded or homogeneous subset of the cultural resources available in the world," and the Korean reggaetón fans I interviewed held this view. Although there are different layers and nuances of the definition of cosmopolitan, those who

bring reggaetón to the wider public, who passionately listen to reggaetón, and who even dabble into the genre in South Korea are all cosmopolitans to some extent.

The Korean War and Latin Music

This section illustrates how the Korean War has enabled Latin music to travel to South Korea by means of Latinx soldiers. Although reggaetón was not introduced until the early 21st century, the 20th century (the Korean War and onward) provided the historical foundations for today's Latin music scene. I first discuss the postwar presence of U.S. Army in South Korea and its influence on the contemporary Korean popular music industry. I view this as macro-level globalization because the way the U.S. military penetrated into the Korean musicscape involves large-scale processes. By contrast, I view the way Latinx soldiers within the U.S. military brought Latin music to South Korea as a form of micro-level globalization as it was done by individuals and small groups. I describe how personal motivations and interactions shaped an early Latin music presence in South Korea. In conclusion, I discuss how macro- and micro-level processes of globalizations go hand in hand, even if micro-level globalization has been more critical to the dissemination of Latin music.

The United States began to exert political and diplomatic control in South Korea even before the outbreak of the Korean War. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) was the official ruling body of the southern half of the Korean Peninsula from 8 September 1945 to 15 August 1948, between the surrender of Imperial Japan and the

establishment of the independent South Korean government.[27] When the Korean War broke out on 25 June 1950 following what was recognized as the North Korean invasion of South Korea, the United Nations Security Council authorized military assistance "to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area" (UN Security Council n.d.). The United States provided approximately 90% of the military personnel in the UN force (Pembroke 2018). The Korean War turned into the biggest global war following the World War II as the United Nations Command,[28] China, and the Soviet Union all participated. The Korean War changed the Korean landscape of defense and the United States Army remained there in the aftermath.[29] Although the Korean War ended in a truce in 1953, United States Forces Korea (USFK) was established in 1957 and still exists today. USFK just opened its new headquarters in "Camp Humphreys," located in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province in South Korea. As the United States' largest overseas military base, Camp Humphreys is expected to house at total of 45,000 troops, contractors, and family members by 2022 (Hincks 2018). This powerful symbol of American hegemony has existed on the southern half of the Korean Peninsula for about seven decades now.

The influence of the U.S. military on the Korean Peninsula marks the advent and transformation of Korean popular music since the mid-20th century. In her exploratory paper "Inflow of American Pop Music into S. Korea through American 8th Army Show," Ha (2009) describes how the early Korean pop music industry developed by catering to the Eighth United

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[27] After the defeat of the Empire of Japan in World War II, Japanese colonies were divided and occupied by the Soviet Union and the United States. The Korean peninsula was partitioned into two and the northern half was subjugated to the Soviet Union and the southern half to the United States.

[28] The United Nations Command (UNC) was established in 1950 in support of South Korea during and after the Korean War. It is structured as the unified command for the multinational military forces. UNC and the Chinese-North Korean Command signed the Korean Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953.

[29] Landscapes of defense mean the landscapes "shaped or otherwise materially affected by formal or informal defensive strategies to achieve recognizable social, political or cultural goals" (Gold and Revill 1999, 229).

States Army (EUSA).[30] The need to entertain an increasing number of American military personnel stationed in South Korea after the Korean War encouraged the formation of *Mipalgunsyo* (미8군쇼). *Mipalgunsyo* is a generic term that refers to consolatory shows or morale-boosting performances for the EUSA, which flourished in the early 1960s. They usually consisted of dancing, singing, band music, short play, and magic, but music was the heart of the events. Wind bands, theatrical companies, and entertainment agencies sprang up to meet the demand of around 150 clubs for the American officers and enlisted men as of the early 1960s. Local agencies not only planned the shows but also trained performers and singers in Western music theory, which facilitated Koreans' arrangement and imitation of American popular music (Ha 2009). Among the many other ways in which the EUSA caused social changes in South Korea, *Mipalgunsyo* accelerated the influx of American popular music into South Korea and laid the groundwork for Korean popular music industry in the post-Korean War era and onward.

The story of one famous Korean guitarist and singer-songwriter of the time effectively illustrates how American sounds infiltrated into South Korea and influenced its post-war popular music scene. The guitarist, known as Shin Jung-hyeon or Shin Joong-hyun, made his debut at a U.S. military base. He developed his passion for Western music by listening to American Forces Korea Network (AFKN).[31] In an interview with *The Guardian*, he recalls that he built his own radio to listen to American music and how mesmerized he was by anything played on AFKN. He

[30] The EUSA is a U.S. field army and the principal force of all United States Army troops in South Korea.

[31] The American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) is the broadcast service for United States Forces Korea. It was created on 27 September 1950 and placed under the control of the 8th U.S. Army in Korea. The primary mission of Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) in Seoul in the early stage of the Korean War was twofold: to aid the command in dispatching emergency information and to help the commander disseminate command subjects, news and entertainment. When the war had ceased, AFKN would remain with American servicemen in South Korea and its general mission changed: to provide a "stateside" broadcast environment designed to help improve the morale of U.S. troops in the Republic of South Korea (Priscaro 1962).

mimicked the psychedelic rock sounds emanated from the U.S. and became a psychedelic pop star in his own right, later gaining global acclaim (Chick 2011). He is now often referred to as Korea's "Godfather of Rock." He later said that Korean rock was born on U.S. military bases (Russell 2012), which underscores the impact of the U.S. military presence on Korean contemporary culture. American hegemony in the Korean musicscape continues today through diverse media channels that distribute music.

Music was central to the show business circuit that entertained American soldiers and it provided social spaces in which they could gather. Ha (2009) cites a few Korean newspaper articles that point out how music genres that were played in each show differed depending on the musical preference of the audience. Groups at the time appear to be divided by race and rank. According to a *Hankook Ilbo*'s newspaper article, clubs would play bebop when they had a lot of African American customers, but they would play rock and roll when the majority were white. A Korean magazine *Shindonga* also describes how soldiers from the North and South of the United States would stand up and give a shout at different songs. These articles recognize participants based only on region and race—North versus South and white versus black. However, there is no consideration for ethnicity, which the U.S. government deems distinct from race.[32] Therefore, I see the need to insert ethnicity such as Hispanic or Latino into this narrative.

During the Korean War, 148,000 Hispanics served in the U.S. military and Puerto Rico's 65th Infantry unit, consisting of over 4,000 troops, was the largest U.S. infantry regiment in the region (U.S. Army Center of Military History n.d.). According to the U.S. Army Center of Military History (2011), many of the Hispanic soldiers who fought in Korea were members of

[32] Federal agencies categorize race into five groups—white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is divided into two categories: Hispanic or Latino, and not Hispanic or Latino.

the 65th Infantry Regiment, established in 1898 by the U.S. War Department following the end of the Spanish-American War to administer Puerto Rico. It is nicknamed "The Borinqueneers" or "Los Borinqueneers" after the original Taíno name of the island.[33]

It appears that the 65th Infantry's service was not widely acknowledged until recently. Franqui-Rivera (2016), one of the few scholars who has researched the all-Puerto Rican infantry regiment, calls these soldiers "the forgotten heroes of a forgotten war." According to him, the efforts to recover the history and record of the *Borinqueneers* mostly come from members of the Puerto Rican diaspora. He argues that the soldiers had been forgotten for more than half a century until they were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2014 in Washington, D.C.[34] Some publications of the 21st century have made their story more accessible to the public as well: the documentary film *The Borinqueneers* (2007), the book *Honor and Fidelity: The 65th Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953* (2009), and publications by U.S. Army Center of Military History (2011).

Honor and Fidelity: The 65th Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953 (Villahermosa and ASSOC 2009) offers general information about the 65th Infantry and a vivid description of their activities during the Korean War. According to the book, the regiment was composed of recruited Puerto Rican soldiers, the majority of whom went to war willingly. Most spoke English as well as Spanish although language barriers temporarily undermined the group's combat effectiveness. Most importantly, the book captures the presence of music in the 65th Infantry's journey and stay in Korea. For instance, the regiment's departure on 27 August 1950 from San Juan, Puerto

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33 Taíno is one of the original indigenous tribes that inhabited Puerto Rico.

34 President Obama awarded the 65th Infantry Regiment the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award in the U.S., on 10 June 2014 in appreciation of their service in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War ("Obama Awards Borinqueneers With Congressional Gold Medal" 2014). However, the design of the medal was not finalized until the summer of 2015 and the regiment was presented the Congressional Gold Medal in a ceremony on Capitol Hill again on 13 April 2016 (Leipold and Lopez 2016).

Rico's capital on the island's Atlantic coast, to Pusan,[35] the biggest port city in South Korea is described in this way:

> Loading took six more hours than expected, primarily because of the difficulty in moving equipment-laden men through the ship's narrow stairwells and passageways. "The deployment was pretty chaotic," recalled Captain Friedman long after. "We looked a little like a rock band with all the musical instruments being carried aboard, along with all of the paraphernalia that troops embarking for a long voyage to a combat zone normally carry." (24)

Commensurate with the quantities of musical instruments carried across the globe, the 65th Infantry created its own regimental orchestra known as the Mambo Boys that played Latin American music. Villahermosa (2009) also adds that morale officers provided tape players to soldiers along with cassettes of Puerto Rican music during the war.

The 65th Infantry was not the only Spanish-speaking unit in the Korean War. Colombia participated alongside the United States under a UN mandate as the only Latin American country in the war. Colombia sent an infantry battalion, three frigates, and 5,204 soldiers to fight for South Korea (Coleman 2005). "The Colombia Army in Korea, 1950-1954" (2005) also describes musicians because recreational activities, especially music, cannot be discounted from the experiences of soldiers fighting in a foreign land. The article talks about musical activities first, among many other activities such as athletic competitions:

> The infantry battalion supported several groups of musicians, and band contests often ran deep into the night. To entertain visiting U.S. soldiers, Colombian musicians quickly added several American swing songs to their repertoire, a musical display General Van Fleet described as "magnificent." The Colombians also "added some spice to the dreary operations in Korea" through the introduction of "lurid mambuco [sic.] dances."[36] (1168)

[35] Pusan is now officially Busan, but I have chosen to adopt the name that the author used in the book.

[36] The correct term is bambuco. Bambuco is a traditional Colombian string music genre in 6/8 time.

Considering the state of war, music of the Mambo Boys' and of Colombian soldiers was unlikely to have been shared with the Korean public. Nonetheless, as these records demonstrate, Latin music made inroads into South Korea as early as the early 1950s.

We can see that the music-related globalization through the Korean War is conducted on two levels: macro and micro. *Mipalgunsyo* and AFKN are macro-level influences. *Mipalgunsyo* was a trend prompted by Korean society's economic needs and the U.S. military's desire for entertainment.[37] Show business gave birth to the structure of this industry. AFKN affected the soundscape in South Korea as an institutional international radio service of the United States. On the other hand, musicians in the 65th Infantry and the Colombian infantry battalion represented small groups of individuals who played primarily for themselves. Even though a macro-level globalizing force, the war, enabled Latinx soldiers to bring music to Asia in the first place, Latin American music created its space through micro-level processes. Micro-level globalization remains influential on the 21st-century Latin music scene in Seoul, which is discussed further in the following section.

The 21st Century: Reggaetón and Cosmopolitans

In the segment below, I present different kinds of stakeholders of reggaetón in contemporary Seoul through storytelling. The stakeholders identified through my participant observation and individual testimonies are largely divided into two groups: 1) Hispanic American soldiers and 2) young Korean and Latinx cosmopolitans. I explore how they have been

[37] The Korean War resulted in a dire economic situation in South Korea. Historians say that the war killed between three million and four million people, as many as 70 percent of which may have been civilians (Stack 2018). In the aftermath of the war, the economy was devastated and there was not much work that guaranteed good and stable income outside of American military bases. In 1960, GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita of South Korea was $158.237 in current USD, which was less than that of Ghana ($182.979) (World Bank 2019).

or are contributing to the reggaetón scene in South Korea. The significances and implications of the trend within the overarching theme of music and globalization will be examined in my conclusion.

Hispanic American soldiers played a significant role in building the foundation for the Latin music scene in South Korea. The all-Puerto Rican regiment left the peninsula in November 1954, but as mentioned above, American soldiers have been stationed in the country ever since. According to Reynolds and Shendruk (2018), 43 percent of men and 56 percent of women among enlisted recruits in 2016 were Hispanic or another racial minority. Although there is a lack of data about what percentage of U.S. troops dispatched there is or has been Hispanic, it is safe to extrapolate that South Korea has had continuous contact with Hispanic soldiers for many decades.

DJ Ricky, a Korean DJ, testifies that Hispanic American soldiers have had a great influence in creating the space filled with Latin music and dance in South Korea.[38] He is one of the Koreans with most hands-on experience in the Korean Latin music and dance scene. His Facebook profile introduces him as "The First & The Best Latin DJ of Korea since 1999."[39] He entered the scene as a salsa dancer and now plays various Latin genres including salsa, bachata, merengue, cumbia, mambo, and reggaetón. It is no surprise that he is very well-known among Latin dance enthusiasts in South Korea because he is seen at all the big Latin music and dance festivals as well as clubs.[40] He not only plays in South Korea but is invited to DJ at festivals all

[38] Even though he himself is a very important figure in the development and promotion of Latin music in South Korea, in this section I will only focus on his testimonies regarding the influence of Hispanic American soldiers. His personal background will be further discussed later as a Korean immigrant who came back from Latin America.
[39] https://www.facebook.com/korea.latin.dj.ricky. Accessed May 7, 2019.
[40] Latin dance is a general term that refers to types of partner dance, most of which originated in Latin America.

across Asia and beyond.[41] An interview with the renowned DJ conducted by two Korean bloggers in 2014 demonstrates the ways in which Hispanic American soldiers contributed to the Latin music scene by providing physical resources. He describes how his DJ career started in this way:

> When Caliente just opened, I worked as a club manager there. At that time Hispanic soldiers DJed and I listened to their music carefully, which helped [in] developing my own taste. In the 2000s, no matter how interested you were in Latin music, there was no resource for DJs. There was nowhere to find music and everything on the Internet was illegal.[42] And then, something like destiny happened. As the Hispanic American soldier who was DJing at Caliente returned to his homeland after the termination of his service, he left 300 CDs of Latin music. I naturally started DJing while I was managing them. Looking back, the CDs were what distinguished me from other DJs. General Korean DJs could not compete with my resources. They are still my souvenir today.[43]

I found another blog post of an interview conducted in 2006 for a cross reference:

> If there is a difficulty as a salsa DJ in South Korea, it is the collection of music materials. Salsa music was very rare at an early stage. The salsa music CDs that a Puerto Rican friend gave to Lee Jungmin at La Salsa were the best equipped collection.[44] They were a great amount: 300 salsa CDs and 150 merengue CDs organized in alphabetical order by artists' name. Besides, classic albums are hard to obtain even if you tried to import from abroad through Amazon these days. These CDs were national-treasure-level materials because they contain all the important salsa music from the early 1980s. DJ Ricky received them as a sort of severance pay when he quit La Salsa.[45]

These interviews confirm that the physical resources handed down from Puerto Rican soldiers influenced the best-known Korean Latin DJ today and thus developed the Latin music scene there. Since the Korean War, the tie with Latinx soldiers created an ongoing influx of Latin music.

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[41] In 2018, he was invited to play in different Latin dance festivals in countries such as Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States.

[42] He must have meant that there was no website at the time where he could pay for music and download it legally.

[43] http://www.ahsvuniv.org/m.index.php?g_page=lecture&m_page=lecture05&page=4&bb_code=12210&view=read&cate=10&wd=2

[44] La Salsa is a salsa club in Gangnam area in Seoul, South Korea.

[45] https://blog.naver.com/superlatindj/220353652930

Another way in which Hispanic American soldiers led the creation and advancement of the Latin music scene in South Korea was by creating dance spaces. As briefly mentioned above, Caliente was a very symbolic venue that foregrounded and maintained Latin American culture in Seoul. According to DJ Ricky's Facebook post from 7 January 2011, the club attracted a large number of Latinxs. There were more Latinxs than Koreans although both were welcome. He recalls, "Every weekend was literally hot (*caliente*). … Every weekend was Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic."[46] During my interview with him in 2018, he shared more background about Caliente:

> About 30% of the American soldiers in South Korea were Hispanic… from Panama, Dominican Republic… When they come to South Korea as contract soldiers, they want to hear music from their homeland such as salsa, bachata, merengue, and reggaetón… Latinxs from USFK used go out to party every weekend. Back then it was mostly salsa, bachata, and merengue. The U.S. Army set a curfew following the 9/11 attacks and the nightlife business dropped off. That's when the Latin nightclub called Caliente came in, but it closed down three years ago. Caliente became the Holy Land for the United States Armed Forces in South Korea because the community of home folks was built there. It was the kind of place where you needed to go if you wanted to listen to Latin music in South Korea. Korean Latin music fans also came and 200-300 people filled the club every weekend.[47]

The Hispanic American and Latin American contract soldiers created a need for such local businesses, which invigorated the space where Koreans could meet Latin Americans. It clearly shows how important it is to have physical contact between groups for a foreign culture to find its place in another. In the same vein, DJ Ricky also mentioned how Itaewon's nightlife is not like it used to be because the USFK relocated from Yongsan, Seoul to Camp Humphreys in

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46 https://www.facebook.com/korea.latin.dj.ricky.

47 DJ Ricky. Interview by author. Seoul, July 14, 2018.

Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province.[48] Again, this proves the role that Hispanic soldiers play in shaping, boosting, and consuming nightlife in central Seoul.

From here, I shift focus to consider my own experiences with different types of Latinx visitors in Seoul—students, travelers, etc.—as well as Korean participants. I adopt storytelling methods so as to describe my experiences more vividly and deliver everyone's stories with rich cultural context. I also incorporate my observations and quotes from conversations with interviewees. Through each person's story, I hope to highlight how various young individuals are driving the reggaetón scene in Seoul presently. This trend contrasts with earlier periods when Latin music traveled under the umbrella of U.S. military power and when soldiers were the driving force of Latin music consumption.

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Right after I came back from my study abroad program in Mexico in 2014, I began to engage with the community of Latinx students at Seoul National University (SNU). I was quite confident in my Spanish abilities after having spent one year in Mexico studying and traveling. I joined a student club called eSNUreños that provided a community for Spanish-speaking students at SNU through weekly reunions and special events.[49] Anyone interested in Spanish or in making international friends could participate. Although our Spanish and Korean proficiency varied a lot and we were from different majors, eSNUreños did a good job of creating a family-

[48] Itaewon is one of the major nightlife areas in Seoul and it belongs to Yongsan. In order to foreground the discussion about nightlife and give context to different fieldwork sites in Seoul, I review nightlife areas in Seoul. There are largely three prominent ones, each of which has distinct characteristics: Gangnam is where upscale clubs and lounge bars are located as it is described in the song "Gangnam Style" by Psy; Itaewon is a multicultural district as well as the epicenter of the Korean LGBT community, located in the same borough as the old U.S. Army Garrison; Hongdae, named after a university in the area, is characterized by young crowd, subcultures, and arts.

[49] The name eSNUreños was coined by the student group to mean 'people at SNU' in Spanish. eSNUreños was created by a student in the Department of Hispanic Language and Literature in 2013 and has not been active since 2016.

like atmosphere for members. As part of the group, I quickly became aware of the presence of Spanish-speaking or Latin American students on campus. Suddenly, Spanish speakers were everywhere, on my way to class, in the dorm's cafeteria, at the library, and so on. Whilst I was an active member of the student club, we had students from Mexico, Peru, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Spain, France, Poland, among others. We were a group of cosmopolitans who were open to experiencing other cultures.

With my Spanish-speaking friends from eSNUreños I began to explore bars and restaurants in Seoul with Spanish and Latin American elements. For example, there was a small restaurant/bar called Sudamérica near campus. The Korean couple who owned the place backpacked in Latin America for two years as a honeymoon trip, so there were a lot of pictures from the region on the wall. They learned Spanish language and Latin American cuisine while traveling and ended up opening the restaurant. Written in both Korean and Spanish, all of their menus listed foods and beverages from Spain or Latin American countries. The music in the space was also very regional. The owners even preferred hiring students from Latin America as their part-timers. I had a few friends from eSNUreños who worked at Sudamérica.

Another place our group of Spanish speakers frequented was Mike's Cabin. Mike's Cabin was undoubtedly my friends' favorite bar/club in Seoul. It was somewhere that they would go at the end of a night in order to dance to Latin pop and reggaetón. Mike's Cabin is nothing like a typical Korean bar/club. Everything from its interior design to the choice of music stands out. Just like its name suggests, the place looks like a cabin with wooden chairs, tables, and counters. A skateboard ramp at the center of the club and a transparent elevator with scratches and scribbles on the wall panels exude an air of playfulness and youth. Drinks are pretty cheap,

which aligns with the aesthetic of the club. When it comes to music, Mike's Cabin plays anything and everything, unlike many other big and popular clubs in Seoul that prefer mainstream electronic music, hip hop, and American pop. The nationalities of customers at Mike's Cabin are so diverse that it seems like a small island of cosmopolitans. Foreigners comprise about 30% of the club's bartenders as well. According to a Korean staff member at Mike's Cabin, the club hires them despite cultural differences in work ethic so as to cater to international customers and maintain its international atmosphere.[50] The combination of these factors makes Mike's Cabin an attractive venue for diverse audiences.

However, the main reason why Mike's Cabin was our number-one hangout spot was because we were able to dance to reggaetón and Latin pop with the crowd. It was one of few places in Seoul where you could expect to hear reggaetón on any weekend, surrounded by a young crowd, while feeling comfortable and unpretentious. Hanging out with Latinx friends in Seoul, I began to see the role of places such as Sudamérica and Mike's Cabin in bringing young Korean and Latinx cosmopolitans together around Latin music and culture. I decided to approach young Koreans and Latinxs in these places to hear their stories.

Surprisingly, finding Latinx cosmopolitans in Seoul was one of the easiest tasks of my fieldwork. I met them on the first day of my fieldwork at the guesthouse where I had just arrived. Sinchon Kimchee Guesthouse is an economy guesthouse in Hongdae and Sinchon area, the most widely known area in Seoul for its vibrant night life, street art, and youth culture. Since I had already planned to go to Mike's Cabin in Hongdae for my fieldwork, I decided to stay in the area for the weekend. Drawing on my experiences of backpacking in 16 countries wandering from hostel to hostel, the guesthouse looked like a typical spot catering to young travelers: affordable

[50] Sungmin. Interview by author. Seoul, July 21, 2018.

and situated within walking distance of stores, restaurants, bars, and clubs. It was obvious from the entrance that the guesthouse receives more foreigners than nationals: The receptionist looked Korean, but he spoke better English than Korean. All the signs in the building were in both English and Korean, if not only in English. I did not feel like I was in my home country. Staff and guests alike, few people who passed by me in the hostel were Korean.

After being instructed in the guesthouse's rules at the desk and unpacking my bags, I went down to the common area in the basement to make some friends. I was mainly hoping to find Latinxs to go out with later that night. The spacious common area was welcoming with a computer station, TV and couch, kitchen and dining area, smoking room, laundry room, and even a karaoke machine. The space was definitely designed to facilitate socializing and an exchange of information—the kind of experiences that travelers in a foreign country would seek out. More people flocked together in the basement as dinner time approached. As more people spoke, I heard Spanish with different accents here and there and I was dying to know what brought them to Seoul.

The first person I talked with was from Spain—obvious from his accent. He was sitting right next to me on the couch when he started a conversation. He found my fluent Spanish impressive like almost every native Spanish speaker does, which always serves me well as icebreaker and rapport builder. This Spanish guy in his late 20s was working in China as a personal trainer and visiting South Korea to renew his Chinese visa. He said that both of his parents are from Dominican Republic and they met each other in New York City before they moved to Spain. I could tell at first glance that he was enthusiastic about other cultures. Not long after we met, he talked passionately about his observations on cultural differences between China

and South Korea. I contributed to the conversation by sharing my viewpoint and cultural understanding as a Korean. We went on to toss around the idea of going out that night and he brightened up at the idea of going to a place with Latin music. He could not hide his love for salsa and bachata.

While we were talking, a Peruvian guy sat down in front of us and joined the conversation. They knew each other already. At first, I thought he was an international exchange student who was spending one or two semesters in South Korea or a full-time student with Korean Government Scholarship Program.[51] Most of my Latinx friends belonged to those groups. After a short chat, I realized he was studying at the Republic of Korea Naval Academy in Jinhae through an exchange program that exists between navies around the world.[52] He had received a full scholarship for his studies from the Peruvian Ministry of Defense under the condition that he returned to Peru after the completion of his program. I remembered that there are a lot of different ways to study in South Korea—I had a Colombian friend who I actually met at Mike's Cabin and whose undergraduate program was funded through a taekwondo scholarship. He said that he travels to Seoul on weekends whenever possible despite the five-hour bus trip because Jinhae is boring. He seemed quite excited because it was the night of the World Cup 2018 match between Peru and France.

I was happy to have met the two of them, but what was more fascinating to me is that there were two native Spanish speaker staff members at the guesthouse. I wondered how they

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[51] The Korean Government Scholarship Program "provides international students with opportunities to conduct undergraduate & graduate programs at higher educational institutions in the Republic of Korea in order to promote international exchanges in education and mutual friendship between countries" (NIIED 2019). Many of my Latinx friends at SNU were awardees of this government scholarship.

[52] Jinhae is one of the most geographically sheltered and most distant boroughs of Seoul with 193,586 residents in January 2019. The borough hosts major naval facilities of the South Korean navy.

ended up working in Seoul and if they were aware of the reggaetón scene. I found a chance to chat with one of them in the common area while he was taking a break. He looked to be in his 30s. I would not have known that he was from Mexico City if we had not talked because his English was flawless. He was working at the guesthouse in return for free accommodation, which is what I did while traveling in Mexico back in 2014; I felt a sense of kinship with him for that reason. As I shared my history in Mexico, he shared his in South Korea. He traveled around the country for one month when he first visited. His second trip became a three-month-long stay. He liked Seoul so much that he had returned for the third time and had already stayed for three months. He told me that he was considering moving to London in about two months and working there because he had a British passport. Since he mentioned that he likes to drink, hang out, and go out with guests, I got curious about which nightlife venues he would introduce them to. From my experiences of working at a hostel, I knew that staff is bound to be an informal guide of the town.

The first night at the guesthouse went by watching the soccer match between Peru and France at a bar, which the Spanish guy found deeply regrettable. He was so adamant about going somewhere with Latin music that he called a taxi and dragged three people including me to Mike's Cabin around 4-5am in the morning.[53] He had already heard from the Peruvian guy that Mike's Cabin is the right place to go to. However, it was too late to get in. Since the Spanish guy was going back to China at the end of the weekend, it was practically a done deal that we were going to Mike's Cabin for a second night out the following night. The Mexican staff member also joined our crew. He said he liked the club and sometimes took guests there. We grew into a

[53] Many bars/clubs in Seoul are open through the night.

group of a Korean, a Peruvian, a Spanish, a Mexican, and two Brazilians in their 20s because someone extended an invitation as they arrived at the guesthouse.

As we walked to the club from the guesthouse, I asked the Mexican staff why he likes Mike's Cabin and why he introduces it to international visitors. His answer boils down to two reasons: music and people. The first reason was obvious and predictable. The club plays a wide array of Latin music. For instance, songs range from "Macarena" (1993) to "Despacito" (2017) and artists vary between Marc Anthony and MC Kevinho.[54] The other reason was less obvious to me: the type of people there. He said that he can easily find English or Spanish-speaking Koreans at Mike's Cabin and thus it is a lot more fun. I realized that I was one of them. Mike's Cabin was breaking down language barriers for him and opened a window of communication to Korean people. I have seen many foreigners living in South Korea without speaking Korean at all and he was one of them. He added that the attitude of Koreans at Mike's Cabin is also different from that of general local Koreans. He felt like people he met at Mike's Cabin were less shy and more open-minded compared to the crowd in other bars/clubs. His overtures of friendship would be reciprocated at Mike's Cabin, whereas most Koreans culturally feel uncomfortable talking to a stranger unless introduced by someone they already know or in a formal group setting. Considering the exclusive and group-oriented socializing culture of South Korea, Mike's Cabin is an anomaly. This "less Korean" space was, perhaps ironically, allowing a Spanish-speaking foreign globetrotter to interact with locals and have more enriching experience of Seoul.

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[54] Marc Anthony is an American Latin and salsa singer and producer. His parents are from Puerto Rico. MC Kevinho is a Brazilian artist whose song "Olha a Explosão" (2016) ("Watch the Explosion") gained popularity in 2017 to the extent that it is played at a Korean club. At Mike's Cabin, you can expect to hear not only classic hits such as "Macarena" but also relatively new releases. Countries and artists of music also vary a lot geographically.

Mike's Cabin resonated with some Koreans as well, such as a 23-year-old Korean university student named Minjoo. When I saw her at Mike's Cabin, she was dancing to reggaetón alone on the skateboard ramp in a very unique way. Far from *perreo*, she invented her own choreography that responded to each song's lyrics. For instance, she would make a triangle shape with her arms hearing the word *casa* (house). She was enjoying herself a great deal as she created her own cute moves—nothing like reggaetón's commonly known dance style. If I had to describe her choreography at the moment, it would have been "a Korean's adaptation of reggaetón." She was definitely one of the "real" fans of the music. I was determined to interview her, got her number that night, and called her up. We met up at a coffee shop a few days later.

Her love of reggaetón was impressive. She said that she listens to reggaetón every day and her playlist is almost only reggaetón. How did she become such a big fan of reggaetón? The influence of her experiences in Spain was critical. She reminisced about her short history with reggaetón:

> Before I went to Spain, I did not know anything about reggaetón. My first exposure to reggaetón was during my study abroad program in Barcelona. My roommates in a *piso compartido* (shared apartment) used to play reggaetón every day since early in the morning and I hated it. The music at first sounded tacky to me. However, as my study abroad neared the end, I started to actively look for reggaetón. I began to find it exciting as I became accustomed to its sound through my roommates and streets in Barcelona. … I also went on a road trip to Malaga towards the end of my stay in Spain with some Korean Spanish friends who continuously played reggaetón and I learned to like it.[55]

Spain introduced her to the world of reggaetón and she "learned" to enjoy it. It is not the music itself that attracted her. Something changed between her first encounter with "lousy reggaetón" and her return to South Korea with the newly acquired preference for it, and it involved an

[55] Minjoo. Interview by author. Seoul, July 16, 2018.

attraction to a particular club. Throughout the interview, she told me that she likes Mike's Cabin than any other place in Seoul and explained why, using Spain as a point of reference:

> While in Korean clubs there are invisible walls between people and flirting is outright,[56] I liked clubs in Spain better because they have less walls. It is easier to mingle with strangers and have fun. Mike's Cabin is just like that. I got so excited and drunk on the first night I went out to Mike's Cabin and I said hi to people going around every table. And later that night I met my current boyfriend there.[57]

Her time in Spain gave her a better vantage point to assess her own culture and allowed her to opt for the one that works better for her. She became a cosmopolitan insofar as she was able to incorporate the manners, languages and social customs from cities in Spain (Scruton 2007). And now as an avid fan and a stakeholder, she is patronizing the space where reggaetón thrives in Seoul.

These Latinx and Korean cosmopolitans are representative of the continuous influx of people who currently support reggaetón performance, but who ignited the Latin music scene? This is a different community from the scene for Latin dancers in South Korea. I wondered whether places like Mike's Cabin began to play reggaetón because the owners noticed recent music trends and wanted to attract reggaetón fans or because reggaetón fans have been requesting and creating a space from bottom-up, so to speak. I interviewed DJ Sungmin who used to play music at Mike's Cabin and now works as a bartender there. His remarks prove that cosmopolitans, in this case immigrants in particular, played an important role in the creation of the local reggaetón scene:

> I think Mike's Cabin started to play reggaetón about four years ago. Our manager was trying to secure her Korean Guatemalan customers and she received song requests from

[56] Since it is not natural for Koreans to start a conversation with a stranger, if someone talks to you in a club at all, it is most likely flirting. The fact that the Korean club culture involves less dancing (people usually face the DJ console swaying left and right), a lot of Koreans tend to think that the purpose of clubbing is to flirt with someone.
[57] Minjoo. Interview by author. Seoul, July 16, 2018.

> them. Now that Mike's Cabin has become more popular and crowded, they do not come to Mike's Cabin anymore. They go to Dolce Vita in Itaewon instead. There is a Korean Guatemalan guy who started this movement. … As Korean Guatemalan customers brought their Latin American friends, a group of 5 turned into 10, 10 turned into 50, …. Now you see a lot of Latinxs in South Korea. At one point, Latinxs said that they found Mike's Cabin searching for a Latin bar on the Internet. That is how the identity of the bar has been formed.[58]

Even though the Korean Guatemalans are not musicians themselves, they remind me of Los Kalibres, a reggaetón and J-pop group formed in 2005 by three young Peruvian men of Japanese ancestry who migrated to Japan from Latin America. They say that reggaetón has enabled them to "maintain their LATINO roots" growing up in Japan (LeBrón 2011). Although I failed to interview the Korean Guatemalan organizer and cannot speak to his motivations, I recognize parallels between his experiences and those of Los Kalibres.

Compared to the older Latin music scene for partner dances, this younger and more international scene started only a few years ago. When I asked DJ Sungmin whether he has noticed any difference in the composition of the club's customers over the years, he replied that the crowd used to be only comprised of U.S. soldiers, European students, and Korean Guatemalans at the beginning, but as they played music for them, more Latinxs came through word of mouth.[59] It appears that one Korean Guatemalan who loves reggaetón has helped generate an entire scene.

I wanted to see the party hosted under the initiative of the Korean Guatemalan guy that DJ Sungmin talked about, so I went to the one that he occasionally organized at a pub in Itaewon: Dolce Vita. I discovered this venue and party through a preliminary Instagram search with #레게톤 (reggaetón), but was not aware that he had organized it. I stumbled upon a poster

[58] Sungmin. Interview by author. Seoul, July 21, 2018.
[59] Ibid.

that stood out among many pictures and videos as I scrolled down the search result page. The tropical-flavored poster invited people to a "Latin" party with the phrase "VAMOS DE PARRANDA!" in the center. The image of a beautiful beach with palm trees and parasols reflects the Korean imagination regarding Latin America as a region, which will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 3. The fact that the poster used a Spanish slang word for party, *parranda*, convinced me that there is something authentic about the event. "MUCHO REGGAETON" at the bottom center of the poster also confirmed to me that I should not miss this opportunity to explore different reggaetón scenes in Seoul.

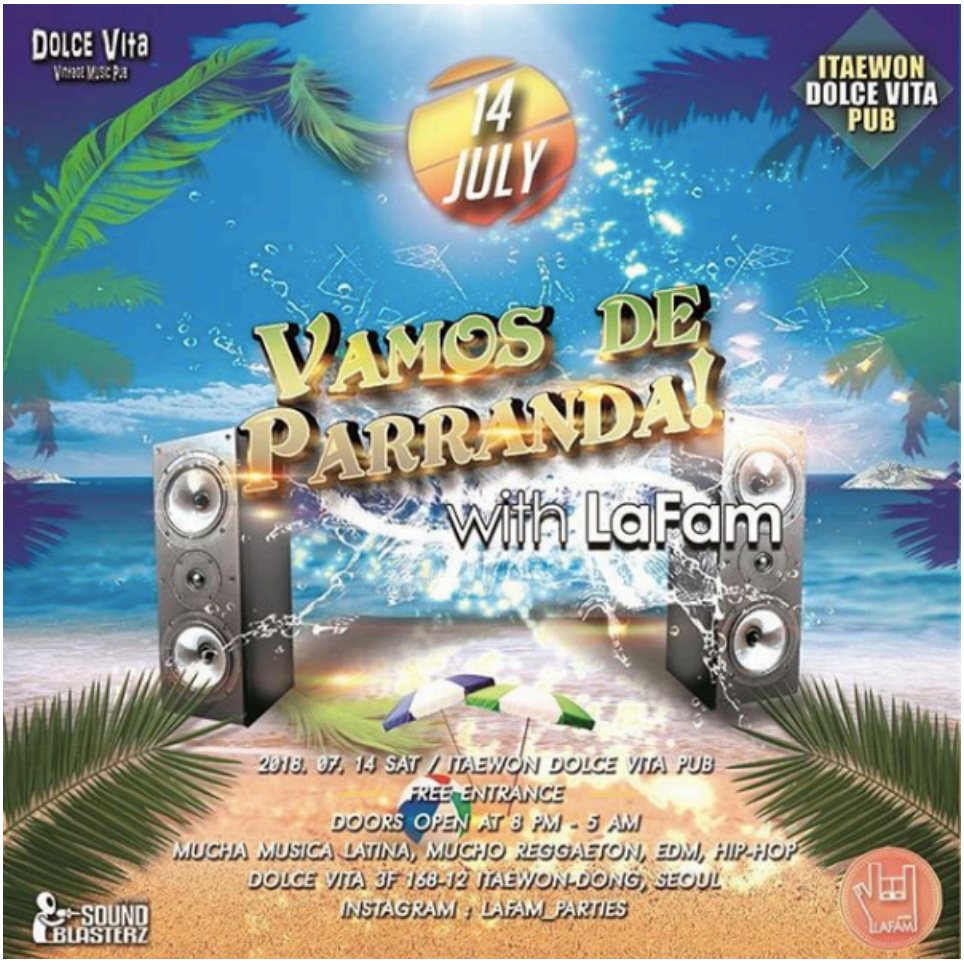

Figure 1. Poster of the Latin Party at Dolce Vita

The atmosphere at Dolce Vita was quite different from a weekend night at Mike's Cabin. Since the event was organized by LaFam,[60] party organizers created a fun and inclusive atmosphere. For instance, they initiated a limbo game and gave out tequila shots to the winners. The layout of the pub, however, was not appropriate for dancing. People were having a good time talking, drinking, and playing foosball or darts, but nobody was dancing despite the selection of very danceable reggaetón and Latin pop songs. I found it strange and interesting at the same time and realized that I was in South Korea.

An interview with the owner and DJ of the pub taught me that there is a philosophy behind the birth of this kind of Latin party which helps explain its distinct atmosphere. The event came into being two years ago when the owner suggested the idea of Latin party to his Korean Guatemalan friends who had immigrated back from Guatemala.[61] He was originally interested in working as a Latin music DJ. He learned salsa dancing and became part of the salsa community. He also DJed at Bulldog, a bar in Itaewon, where you can always expect to hear Latin music and see Latin dancers of various genres: salsa, bachata, merengue, etc. Even though he enjoyed salsa dancing, he found salsa communities in South Korea too rigid and confined to rules. They focus more on getting steps and manners right rather than having fun. In addition, his impression was that if you do not belong to a dance club, it was difficult to practice and blend in because members try to dance with people they already know. The DJ wanted to create a judgment-free space where people felt free to enjoy Latin music without having to know certain steps well. He added that his philosophy as entertainer is to please people by responding to their musical needs,

[60] LaFam is a group of people from different countries and cultures that gathered for Latin parties. Their Instagram account is @lafam_parties.

[61] Dolce Vita. Interview by author. Seoul, July 16, 2018.

which is why he plays reggaetón. He saw the need for reggaetón among his Korean Guatemalan friends and their social circle.

The significance of immigrants in the dissemination of reggaetón in Seoul is also well represented by DJ Ricky. According to a 2006 interview, his family moved to Argentina when he finished elementary school and he spent his adolescence there.[62] When he came back to South Korea, he joined a Spanish club to maintain his Spanish language abilities. There he found a small salsa group called *Paso a Paso* (Step by Step) and learned salsa. As he became more deeply engaged with the community, he began to work at La Salsa and then began DJing in 1999. He has been an invaluable asset to Latin dance communities in South Korea because not only are there few DJs specializing in Latin music, but he is a major advocate of Latin music and dance. He plays reggaetón in bars, festivals, and other socials events.

As I became bored with the lack of dancing at Dolce Vita, I moved to another bar in Itaewon called CatchMe to interview DJ Ricky. I already knew from my Instagram hashtag search that CatchMe hosts "Latin Night" every Saturday featuring him. I wanted to hear a first-hand account of the guru's relationship to reggaetón in his own words. Thankfully, the bar was not busy at all for the Saturday after-midnight hour and he was able to answer my questions. His reasons for playing reggaetón were directly related to the presence of Puerto Rican soldiers in South Korea:

> I began to play reggaetón when Daddy Yankee and Don Omar just made a debut. *Boricuas* (Puerto Ricans) would put me onto different albums and I would search for them. They brought me albums going back and forth [between South Korea and their homeland] and I played them. Since I was in touch with people who had on-site needs, I reflected the latest trend pretty well. I played music that these people preferred regardless of what songs were ranked high on the real-time chart. Since I came from Argentina, I

[62] https://blog.naver.com/superlatindj/220353652930

> was able communicate with them [in Spanish]. I was also familiar with the music I used to hear in clubs [in Argentina] when I was young.

I noticed the increasing popularity of reggaetón among my friends and asked Ricky if he was sensing the phenomenon as a DJ as well. His perspective on it emphasized the aspect of what I called physical contact earlier in this chapter:

> There is someone who received an award at the Riverside Song Festival with a reggaetón song a few years ago.[63] I found it extraordinary and was really surprised. He [the winner] is a Korean American who made music with reggaetón in college and gained popularity. He came to Caliente [a Latin club where DJ Ricky was working] and I recognized him. Whether as an international student or an immigrant, you have to have the intersection [in life experiences] to make you want to search for reggaetón. Most [Korean] people do not know that "Despacito" is reggaetón. They only know that it is Latin. … It is hard to like the genre without having that [cultural] crossing at least once in your life.

DJ Ricky's view highlights the importance of physical contact from a different angle, but the core principle is the same. Physical exchange is the key to global cultural encounters. He and I agree that no matter how accessible reggaetón becomes through streaming services, the real attachment is developed through physical contact and cultural familiarity—whether through immigration, study abroad, or travel—and this experience is replicated in the sociocultural meeting space of the Latin club in Seoul.

Jimena, another interviewee, confirmed DJ Ricky's observation above. She majored in Hispanic Language and Literature at SNU, spent a year in Spain as an exchange student, and traveled to Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil afterwards. A quote from my interview with her demonstrates how culturally powerful and immersive it is to live in a foreign country and how it can transform one's musical tastes:

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[63] Riverside Song Festival was a Korean annual song contest for university students hosted by Munwha Broadcasting Corporation from 1979 to 2001. I was not able to find the person or the song he referred to.

> The reason why I started listening to reggaetón right after I came back to Korea [from Spain] was nostalgia. Ever since, I did not stop listening to reggaetón. Later [through SNU] I met more Latinxs and even more as I began to frequent Mike's Cabin.[64]

When it comes to creating and stimulating the reggaetón scene, people like Jimena with experiences abroad bring a synergy in tandem with Latinx cosmopolitans living in Asia.

However, the growing presence of reggaetón in the Korean soundscape depends not solely on individual experiences. Even though many people who come out to enjoy reggaetón are cosmopolitans, not everyone is. There is a macro-level factor facilitating this trend, as hegemonic as the 20th-century military intervention, yet it does not involve warfare but rather corporate media. I approached this question inductively with interviewees, asking how they view the reggaetón phenomenon and whether they predict its popularity in South Korea will rise in the future. Here are some relevant quotes from Korean interviewees:

> **Jin**: I think "Despacito" influenced South Korea because it was consumed globally, not because reggaetón as a genre appealed to Koreans. The American influence?[65]

> **Sonia**: I think reggaetón's popularity in South Korea will depend on its popularity in the U.S. As more Koreans listen to iTunes and Billboard charts, if a song is ranked up there…[66]

> **Jimena**: Koreans listen to the music that catches on in the U.S. I feel like the growing influence of Latin music in America is being transferred to South Korea. I definitely see more people listening to reggaetón around me. They like the tune although they do not understand lyrics at all.[67]

These three interviewees have traveled to Latin America and speak more than three languages. They have physical paths in life that intersected with reggaetón. Nonetheless, they agree that musical trends in the United States are a central factor in the mass distribution of reggaetón in

64 Jimena. Interview by author. Seoul, July 7, 2018.
65 Jin. Interview by author. Seoul, June 20, 2018.
66 Sonia. Interview by author. Seoul, July 6, 2018.
67 Jimena. Interview by author. Seoul, July 7, 2018.

South Korea. Indeed, Korean artists pay attention to Billboard charts and cover songs that end up reaching national audiences. For instance, a Korean singer-songwriter JeA covered “Despacito” with Korean guitarist Park Joo-won and sang on Radio Star, a popular South Korean talk show. In this way, the charts helped reggaetón find global success.

Chapter 3: Class, Identity, and Gender Politics of Reggaetón

As reviewed in the introduction, academic literature has discussed reggaetón's many sociopolitical associations through the lens of racial, gender, class, and cultural politics. In this chapter, I explore how some of these issues are pertinent for Korean listeners. Music consumers' socioeconomic class, the ways audiences identify with reggaetón, and how they understand gender in relation to Latin America all change in the Korean context. The purpose of the chapter is to explore these issues and to suggest possible local meanings of Korean reggaetón.

The chapter is organized in three sections: first it considers socioeconomic class, then identity, and finally gender and race. Based on my personal experiences and interviewees' testimonies, I discuss how the Spanish-language text of the music influences the socioeconomic profile of reggaetón audiences. Next, I present a few case studies from interview data in which the music functions as a tool for identity formation. Lastly, by incorporating Korean YouTubers' reaction videos and interviews with Korean feminists, I analyze how the genre's music videos are interpreted by Koreans in ways that affect their perception of Latin Americans. Through this chapter, I seek answers to the following questions: "What are the socio-cultural implications of the reggaetón boom in Korean culture?"; "How is reggaetón being appropriated and reinvented in other regions in ways that inform the self-perception of listeners?"; and "How does it influence perceptions of Latin Americans on the part of Korean audiences?" The cultural distance between the two regions allows for the music to be enjoyed by audiences composed of higher socioeconomic classes, to facilitate their identity reinvention, and to perpetuate race-based sexual stereotypes about Latin America.

Socioeconomic Class

The change of reggaetón's status over time from the 1990s until today is quite striking. Many Puerto Rican reggaetón producers and artists are proud that the genre originated in the *barrio* (hood or ghetto) and that countless musicians have "made it" despite the scarce resources they had (Sosa 2013). In rising from the margins of society in Puerto Rico to the global stage, reggaetón has gained a wide range of new audiences—not only from different countries but from different socioeconomic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. During my fieldwork, I realized that the composition of reggaetón listeners in South Korea is markedly distinct.

I did a preliminary research on Instagram using a hashtag #레게톤 (reggaetón) in order to identify the channels through which South Korean youth access reggaetón as well as the themes that the youth associate it with.[68] As of 6 March 2019, there were 925 posts with the reggaetón hashtag. It was impossible to obtain the number of posts for related themes due to Instagram's lack of Boolean search capability.[69] However, I categorized some of the most recurring topics appearing in the 925 posts: words such as "party," "music production," "Zumba/dance," "music review/recommendation," "Spanish language learning," and "traveling."

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[68] A hashtag, widely known as a pound sign, is a type of metadata tag used on social media, especially in Twitter and other microblogging services. It allows users to easily find posts with a specific theme or content. The first use of hashtag was suggested by a Twitter user Chris Messina, an advocate for open-source software, on 23 August 2007. Twitter adopted his proposal and made hashtags an official feature in July 2009 (Seward 2013). Ever since, the use of hashtags has become popular and universal across other social networks.
The reason why I used Instagram to understand various motives for Koreans to consume reggaetón is as follows: As of 3rd quarter of 2017, Instagram was the 4th most heavily used social network in South Korea among people aged from 16 to 64 (Statista 2019). The first was YouTube (74%) and the third was KakaoTalk (58%). Neither of these use hashtags consistently. The second most used social network Facebook (62%) only returned 15 videos and 19 posts with the term #레게톤 (reggaetón) regardless of date posted, post type, tagged location, or uploader type. On the other hand, Instagram (39%) returned 925 posts based on a search of that term along with images and videos which help quickly browse related themes to the hashtag.

[69] Boolean search is a type of search that relies on Boolean search operators (or modifiers) such as AND, OR, and NOT. Users can combine keywords using the operators, thereby refining search and producing more relevant results. For example, I hoped to be able to retrieve posts that contain multiple relevant keywords such as #레게톤 + #줌바 (#reggaeton + #zumba) or #레게톤 + #스페인어 (#reggaeton + #Spanish).

The results demonstrate that the Koreans who posted about reggaetón and know it well enough to recognize it as a genre have various channels of exposure to the music as well as motives for its consumption. At the same time, the wide range of the themes in the 925 posts implies that the composition of the audiences is diverse.[70]

Among the six topics listed above, I would like to center the discussion around the theme "Spanish language learning" that is specific to Koreans rather than Latin Americans, so as to highlight the peculiarity of the composition of Korean reggaetón audiences. Both the results of the Instagram hashtag search and my interview data point to the importance of Spanish language acquisition for Korean reggaetón fans. Based on my interviews, I have noted that they are characterized by high socioeconomic status. My personal experiences and observations in the past also confirm that the uncommonness of reggaetón in South Korea will limit who gets exposed to the music and learns about the culture. Due to linguistic and geographic barriers, Korean reggaetón fans need considerable resources to access the music, whether economic or intellectual. By access I mean more than passing exposure to the genre, since some of the recent reggaetón hit songs such as "Despacito" and "Mi Gente" are already heard in many social venues. During my stay in Seoul in the summer of 2018, I remember going into a small one-person restaurant that sells Japanese ramen and hearing "Despacito" on the sound system. It was definitely not a place where I would otherwise expect to hear reggaetón in South Korea. Thus, I define having "access" to the music as hearing it frequently, over and above passing public dissemination of the music in this way. Access for purpose of this study means having

[70] Audience composition is a business term which refers to demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level, geographic location, etc.) of the listenership, readership, or viewership of a particular advertising medium. I apply the concept to reggaetón in place of advertising medium.

opportunities to learn about the cultural context in which reggaetón developed and developing an attachment to it.

How do reggaetón and Spanish instruction intertwine with each another? I have found that there is a close and significant relationship between culture and second language teaching/learning. Many scholars document the utility of including exposure to cultural forms such as music in foreign language classrooms (Lange and Paige 2003; Hinkel 1999; Byram and Morgan 1994). Lange (2003) argues that culture is the core of language learning. Then what aspect of culture is taught in the language classroom? Ethnomusicologists Herndon and McLeod (1981) state that "the interrelationship of music and culture is real, integral, basic and approachable" (6). What I am going to discuss below is the intersection of music, culture, and second language learning with regards to the reception of reggaetón. I argue that the Spanish-language learning influences the kinds of audiences that have emerged in South Korea for this music, especially in terms of socioeconomic class. To reach this conclusion, I begin with my own story, how I have become a fan of reggaetón. My positionality as a Korean who was born and raised in South Korea until leaving for Mexico at age 20 speaks to the wider cultural meanings of reggaetón consumption in my homeland. My educational history with the Spanish language and some of my interviewees' comments give a glimpse of what it is like to learn Spanish in South Korea.

I cannot fathom how I would be a part of the friend group that always "*perrea*" at every party if I had not learned Spanish. My first Spanish class was in high school. Spanish was my third foreign language after my major in English and minor in Chinese, which means that I only learned very basic Spanish vocabulary and grammar. Even though I was not particularly

interested in Spanish back then, I ended up studying Hispanic Language and Literature at Seoul National University. Frankly, Spanish conjugation and compound tenses were not terribly engaging me at that time. It was not until after I went to Mexico as an exchange student that I learned to enjoy the language deeply. At the end of my sophomore year, I realized that people in my cohort were planning to participate in Study Abroad programs in Spanish-speaking countries such as Spain, Mexico, and Colombia. It almost felt like I had to and there was no reason not to, so I did. Money could have been an obstacle—all the travel expenses and the cost of living abroad—but luckily, I received a scholarship which opened the door for me. I chose to go to Mexico over Spain for two reasons: the lower cost of living and the country's reputation for friendliness. In sum, based on the stories from my friends who had already been to those countries, I imagined I could make more local friends and improve my Spanish easily, while spending less money than in Spain. I wanted to make sure that I plan for the best return on investment. As cliché as it may sound, my time in Mexico was lifechanging. It was the first time I lived outside of my home country and I absorbed everything like a sponge. I tried not to miss any opportunity to immerse myself in the Mexican life and I was stimulated, motivated, and engaged every day like a baby just beginning to learn a language. One of the strategies I adopted to make local friends was to invite myself to gatherings and parties. I would sit down on the bench outside of my dorm building and join in the conversations of others, without being able to understand most of the time, just to practice Spanish. Moreover, I would ask people to let me know whenever there was a party. At some point, both my local and international friends started to call me "party queen," not knowing my motivations.

Partying considerably helped me become fluent in Spanish, and reggaetón proved indispensable to the process. I admit that I did not go to parties only to improve my Spanish. I truly enjoyed Mexican party culture. It was very welcoming to a stranger like me and had no shortage of music or dancing, which is almost the virtual opposite of Korean parties. Koreans tend to be more group-oriented and exclusive when it comes to socializing. They drink a lot,[71] but drinking is not often accompanied by spontaneous dancing in public or loud party music. Karaoke is a significant part of Korean entertainment culture, but people sing in private rooms with their own group. Thus, sharing musical experiences with a larger group was new and fascinating to me, but also made me feel intimate with them effortlessly. We did not dance together because we were friends, but because we danced together, I did become friends with them. Fortunately, this reverse order of socializing worked well for me because I love dancing. Music and dance became an integral part of my life in Mexico. I can confidently say that I would not have been able to learn Spanish so quickly if I had not attended parties in Mexico. My desire to be better at Spanish and to make the most out of my stay in Mexico in some ways resulted in (and from) my consumption of reggaetón.

The close relationship between Spanish learning and an appreciation for reggaetón among Koreans applies to my interviewees' experiences as well. Terrence, another student at SNU majoring in Hispanic Language and Literature, also studied abroad:

> When I went to Mexico as an exchange student, I hung out and traveled with Mexicans I met through the school's International Buddy Program. I would always hear reggaetón, so I got to learn about it. I used to hear it just walking around downtown as well. … I liked reggaetón because it is in Spanish. I did not know what kind of music young people [in Spanish-speaking countries] listened to before [my trip], because the music in Spanish

[71] Koreans are statistically the biggest hard alcohol drinkers in the world. They drink twice as much liquor as Russians and more than four time as much as Americans (Ferdman 2014).

> you learn in South Korea is like "Guantanamera."[72] I learned a lot when I was there [in Mexico City].[73]

I infer from this quote that Terrence would not have been interested in reggaetón if he did not learn Spanish and become curious about the culture of Spanish-speaking youth. Another interviewee Jin, an avid fan of reggaetón and a master's student in Hispanic Language and Literature at the same university, had this to say: "I think the popularity of reggaetón [in South Korea] will grow proportionately to the percentage of the population that studies Spanish. [It is] confined to the people who are exposed to the language."[74] Similarly, Minjoo translates her interest in Spanish into her love of reggaetón:

> I am majoring in English Language and Literature, but I do not enjoy it. There are so many fluent English speakers [in my department]. On the other hand, there is less pressure [to be fluent] in Hispanic Language and Literature. And Spanish is more fun, which is why I went to Spain for Study Abroad. … I think reggaetón is more fun because I know about the lyrics. It's more fun when I sing along knowing what the song is about. I like reading lyrics. It feels like I'm studying as well.[75]

Minjoo applies the same principle to Spanish classes she offers by playing "mild" or non-controversial reggaetón songs for her students and teaching them the lyrics. She said that students like her approach to teaching and that it is easier to engage students by including contemporary cultural content.

I associate Spanish-language learning with higher socioeconomic classes because South Korean public schools rarely offer Spanish. All of my undergraduate cohorts whose major was predetermined as Hispanic Language and Literature upon admission graduated from special

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[72] The song "Guantanamera" is a popular Cuban song and one of the most familiar melodies in the world. Since its popularization in Cuba in the 1930s, it has become iconic of Cuban and Latin American popular culture internationally (Manuel 2006b). But it is not terribly popular among youth audiences in Latin America.

[73] Terrence. Interview by author. Busan, August 4, 2018.

[74] Jin. Interview by author. Seoul, June 20, 2018.

[75] Minjoo. Interview by author. Seoul, July 16, 2018.

foreign-language high schools. High schools in South Korea are typically divided into three categories: special-purpose, normal, and vocational. Special-purpose schools offer specific tracks that align with students' interests and desired careers: science, foreign language, international relations, and art. Not only do students have to take a highly competitive entrance exam in order to attend a special-purpose high school, but the tuition is expensive.[76] Of course, there are students who study Spanish at the university without previous instruction. However, there are only seventeen universities in South Korea that have a Spanish language-related major and all of them are 4-year colleges.[77] Private tutoring is an option outside of the formal education system, but from my experience as a Spanish tutor in Seoul I know that instructors typically charge 25 to 60 USD per hour. Private language academies, language institutes within universities, and online classes represent somewhat less expensive options. Even so, the fact that the formal Spanish education is mostly provided by exclusive foreign-language high schools or 4-year colleges makes Spanish acquisition the purview of socially or economically advantaged groups. It is also worth mentioning that Spanish is still usually a second or third foreign language for Koreans despite its increasing popularity. Those who study Spanish are highly likely to be proficient in English and possibly another foreign language already. English is required as a first foreign language and other languages such as Chinese, Japanese, German, and French have been preferred as second foreign languages. Thus, Spanish learners require additional resources.

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[76] In 2013, a Korean newspaper reported that the average tuition (including matriculation fee and miscellaneous expenses) of special-purpose schools, autonomous private schools, and schools for gifted students was eight times higher than that of normal high schools. The percentage of students attending these "privileged schools" was 5.5% of the total population (Eum, Kim, and Jo 2014).

[77] https://www.work.go.kr/consltJobCarpa/srch/schdpt/schdptSrchDtl04.do?empCurtState1Id=1&empCurtState2Id=9

Another aspect of Spanish-language education to consider is the importance of physical contact, as discussed in Chapter 2. Studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country allows people to accept reggaetón not only as sound but also as a form of social interaction. They get a chance to "live" the music rather than just hear it, which leads to the development of intimacy with it. This is a specific type of experience that is only available for university students. It is uncommon for Koreans to gain personal exposure to the culture of any Spanish-speaking country without such institutional opportunity unless one is an immigrant. Long-term travel could be an alternative, but not everybody can afford it. Again, reggaetón becomes an expensive culture to become familiar with in Asia.

Spanish education also plays a more critical role in reggaetón's devoted Korean fan base than other Latin genres because reggaetón does not have a dance community supporting it. Other popular Latin genres such as salsa and bachata have dance communities through which their music is diffused and consumed. In South Korea, Latin music typically involves partner dancing. By contrast, reggaetón does not. It has a strong dance element, but *perreo* is not a structured dance style learned in classes. Although Zumba exercise classes are gaining popularity in South Korea and do incorporate reggaetón,[78] they do not encourage people to socialize and dance together after class.[79] Since there is no dance community for reggaetón, individual motivations and experiences matter more in creating a regular audience for it. In other words, there are not many ways for the average South Korean listener or dancer to be exposed to the genre.

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[78] Zumba is a fitness program that incorporates dance and aerobic movements. Zumba classes use various music genres including salsa, cumbia, merengue, chachacha, reggaetón, hip hop, samba, tango, flamenco, among others.

[79] However, Zumba is contributing to the mass diffusion of reggaetón. During my stay in South Korea in 2018, I saw my mother watching "Despacito" music video on YouTube on her phone. I asked her how she even knows the song and she said that she learned choreography for it in her Zumba aerobics class. It did not make her a fan of reggaetón, but she was already familiar with the song.

The very language of reggaetón's affects its class associations in the Korean context. Since reggaetón is not visually but aurally disseminated, the Spanish language barrier allows the music to be practically free from associations with its crass working-class roots and the criticism the genre was subject to in 1990s Latin America. The Puerto Rican government and the middle class there tried to censor reggaetón's explicit sexual lyrics and commentary on the violence of everyday life in marginal areas, for instance (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007). Similarly, Cuba has attacked reggaetón for its "sexist, vulgar or obscene language" which is now supported by Decree 349 (Tremlett 2012; Lopez 2019). If the music's lyrics mean nothing to most Korean audiences, it cannot be attacked as contrary to middle-class values. Thus, reggaetón appears less threatening in Asia, unassociated with marginality, and without the stigma.

To conclude, the phrase "economic barriers to entry" aptly characterizes the limited possibilities for Spanish language acquisition available to most Koreans. Barriers to entry consist of obstacles that make it difficult for a firm or client to enter a given market (Bondarenko 2017). They usually occur when the cost of entry into the market is too high. Interview data suggests that Spanish-language instruction has served both as a motivation for and barrier to develop a liking of reggaetón. This economic barrier is typical of all language instruction. My reggaetón fan interviewees consistently demonstrated high proficiency in foreign languages, extensive experiences abroad, and often came from relatively affluent families. Admittedly, a sample of 13 interviewees is too small to draw extensive generalizations from. Nonetheless, the clear commonalities among the interviewees point to a group that is either intellectually or

economically advantaged, or both. These listeners have little to do with a mixed-race, working-class delivery boy born in a Puerto Rican shantytown.[80]

Self-Identity

Musicologist Cristina Magaldi (2009) views the emergence of popular music in Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the 20th century as part of a larger context of internationalized urban culture, suggesting that it illustrates how the middle class imagined themselves and Others. She offers insights into the creation of cosmopolitan identities. Such individuals use music from other cultures to reimagine themselves, intentionally or not. In the same way, world-renowned sociomusicologist of rock Simon Frith (1996, 110) argues that "[m]usic seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective." Perhaps because of the inherent relationship between music consumption and identity politics,[81] a comparison of Rio de Janeiro and Seoul in this sense is not so strange despite the geographic distance between the two cities.

Marketing scholars have been deeply interested in how consumer behavior is linked to the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of identity (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993; Hogg and Michell 1996; Saren 2007).[82] Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett (2009) specifically look at music consumption and argue that "[t]he highly symbolic nature of music means its consumption represents an ideal site through which to examine the development of identity" (77). Similarly,

[80] DJ Negro, born Felix Rodriguez, was a grocery delivery boy. He played a central role during the formative years of reggaetón by producing music and discovering talents such as Vico C (Cepeda 2018).
[81] Here I use the term consumption as "the reception of information or entertainment by a mass audience" from Oxford Living Dictionaries (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/consumption).
[82] Consumption in this context could mean "the purchase of goods and services by the public" from Oxford Living Dictionaries, but both of the definitions qualify for the purpose of this discussion on music consumption.

Frith (1996) argues that identity is mobile and thus a process of becoming. By claiming that music informs rather than mirrors identities, he reverses earlier academic arguments that focused on how a particular piece of music "reflects" the values of social groups: "our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*" (109). Drawing on Frith's and other scholars' perspectives on music and identity, I discuss the listening practices of Korean reggaetón fans in the section with a few quotes from my interviews. The music assists socializing and reconfiguring identity for some Koreans.

Identity formation or transformation was one of the central themes I observed as I engaged in line-by-line analysis of my interview data. This issue seems to provide a response, at least partly, to the question of why Koreans listen to and/or dance to reggaetón. Hargreaves and North (1999) present findings on the functions of music in everyday life that align with emergent themes in my data. They conclude that the functions of music are manifested in three principal ways: in defining interpersonal relationships, mood, and manifestations of self-identity. My personal experiences and those of my interviewees certainly suggest that musical activities shape interpersonal relationships. Reggaetón also affects the mood of my interviewees. A few suggested that they listen to reggaetón while working, doing laundry, washing dishes, or cleaning the house in order to make such tasks more enjoyable. Likewise, Luna listens to reggaetón when she needs an escape from negative feelings such as anger and wants to ignore them. Such social and emotional functions of music are essential. However, I focus below on the cognitive side, the management of self-identity, because cultural differences play a factor in how Korean listeners manage self-identity through reggaetón.

A DJ interacts closely with music audiences and experiences music scenes firsthand. A DJ's job is to read the nonverbal reactions of a crowd to music in real time in order to provide the best experience for them. For this reason, I quote DJ Sungmin's observations about the behavior of distinct audience groups here. Sungmin compares typical Latinx and Korean audiences from his experience of DJing at Mike's Cabin:

> I can feel that the way people react to music changes significantly when I put on Latin music compared to other genres, which might be why I play more Latin music. You know, Latinos express their feelings freely whereas Koreans just talk and leave, and do not passionately have fun even in clubs. I have become interested in Latinos because they are frequently seen really having fun, cheering, dancing, and singing along, on top of some naughty aspects [of the dance styles they adopt] such as *perreo*. At first, I could not understand [their behavior] and hated [it]—because I cannot get off work and go home until they have left, and they party so enthusiastically—, but at some point, I came to like that culture.[83]

Most people, if familiar with both cultures, would agree that Koreans are in general emotionally and socially more reserved than Latinxs. It is necessary to note and understand such cultural and behavioral differences because they allow the reinvention, negotiation, and management of self-identity. What is it about reggaetón and Latin culture that Koreans are appropriating to define, recreate, and claim a distinct identity?

Before diving into this issue, it is important to consider the meaning of the term cultural appropriation in this context. Oxford Living Dictionaries defines cultural appropriation as "[t]he unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society."[84] The term assumes a power relationship between the people who enjoy a culture and the culture being

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[83] Sungmin. Interview by author. Seoul, July 21, 2018.

[84] *Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v.* "cultural appropriation," accessed April 1, 2019, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/cultural_appropriation.

enjoyed. The appropriator tends to take elements of a marginalized culture, divorce them from their original meanings or contexts, and use them for entertainment. It is true that the original associations of reggaetón disappear in the Korean context. There is no consideration of the racial, ethnic, and specific national origins of the genre. People do not see reggaetón as "a cultural signifier for the contested ways in which Latinidad is negotiated in everyday life" (M. M. Rivera 2014), for instance. Instead, it becomes simply another ahistorical cultural product. However, unlike common examples of cultural appropriation by those in the West of Eastern cultures, Koreans' "appropriation" of reggaetón does not entail "majority versus minority" racial or ethnic dynamics or "colonizer versus colonized" power relations. For example, K-Pop fans in Latin America and reggaetón fans in South Korea are essentially equals in terms of the articulation of power relationships. The acknowledgement of the different kinds of cultural appropriation and specificity of the context enhances our understanding of the phenomenon of globalization.

One of the central themes that emerged from multiple interviews is how one's character changes along with changing tastes in music, or vice versa. I label relevant quotes as related to "identity" during my transcribing and coding process because the interviewees' interaction with reggaetón and the culture surrounding it helped them explore, discover, or maintain new identities. We can observe a strong connection between social and cognitive functions of music: the cognitive function of managing self-identity, whether one is conscious of the process or not, relies to certain extent on the social function of promoting interpersonal relationships. Boyoung, one of my interviewees, talked about this issue: "In my opinion, [Korean] people begin to like reggaetón because they enjoy meeting people and dancing together, rather than out of interest in

the genre itself."[85] Reggaetón, with its collective dance culture, fulfills a progressive social function so well that it is attracting Koreans whose typical party and club culture is not as intimate. Boyoung's own preference for reggaetón was influenced by her social preferences:

> I came back to Korea, and you know, there are people [we know] who like reggaetón… [I told myself,] "Let me stop denying it and admit that I like it." I somehow kept listening [to reggaetón] and [I asked myself] "why am I listening to it?" There was a time when I used to call reggaetón my 'guilty pleasure'…[86]

Boyoung implies that her friends are the reason why she came to like reggaetón despite its questionable associations in Latin America. And then she goes on to describe how her friend changed after her stay in Colombia: "My friend taught me "Danza Kuduro" saying that she learned it in Colombia. She was a modest girl, but she transformed during her Study Abroad in Colombia. She urged me to go clubbing the minute she came back to Korea… People change after Study Abroad."[87] Although the episode concerns Latin pop more broadly, the point is that her opinion and experience allude to the meaningful relationship between reggaetón's socializing power and the listener's identity transformation through musical events.

Minjoo, the girl spotted at Mike's Cabin dancing her own dance moves to reggaetón songs, confessed that her personality changed a lot during her year in Spain. She said that she used to be a shy girl who hated public speaking and revealing clothes, but not anymore. What is interesting here again is that she views reggaetón as an important part of her personal transformation:

> If I had gotten into reggaetón earlier, I would have made a lot more friends and had fun [in Spain]. At first, it was difficult for me to make friends because of cultural and

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85 Boyoung. Interview by author. Seoul, July 21, 2018.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.

> language barriers. … My way of thinking changed after seeing things like nude beaches [in Spain], and sexually explicit lyrics [now] don't bother me that much.[88]

Minjoo seemed content with her changed personality and new way of thinking in the aftermath of her year abroad. She looked more confident and even dignified while she was saying that she would not have worn a dress like the one she was wearing during the interview because it is too tight and revealing. (We met on a very hot sticky summer day. The dress was not too tight or revealing by my standards. It was a tight fit in the torso, but not too short.) Similarly, ever since she returned from Spain, she has been listening to reggaetón every day. She also mentioned that she is brainwashing her boyfriend (whom she met at Mike's Cabin) into liking reggaetón. She introduced Mike's Cabin to many of her other friends as well. What made her such a loyal fan and advocate of the music?

Minjoo's dramatic personality transformation and love of reggaetón go hand-in-hand. She used reggaetón in order to mold and maintain a new public persona. Her appropriation of reggaetón is manifest in two different ways. First, she chooses not to accept *perreo* even though she is familiar with it from her experiences in Spain. As mentioned, she dances to reggaetón in her own way, cute and childlike rather than sexual and seductive. It is her interpretation and adaptation of reggaetón that aligns with how she reimagines herself: free and open-minded, but not provocative. The other way she consumes reggaetón is by studying the lyrics. Considering that reggaetón texts have been chastised for misogyny and violence (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007), it is safe to say that she enjoys the music's lyrics primarily as a means to improve her Spanish skills. She avoids identifying herself with the controversial aspects of reggaetón. Her

[88] Minjoo. Interview by author. Seoul, July 16, 2018.

music listening is the experience of *self-in-progress*: selectively adopting elements of the music and dance and actively choosing what about the genre fits into her reconfigured identity.

The way reggaetón is appropriated by Minjoo is twofold—the primary encounter abroad and the following consumption back in South Korea. During her stay in Spain, Minjoo was attached to reggaetón for its social function more than anything. But by the time she returned to South Korea she continued to use the music as a bridge to make friends. Reggaetón accompanied her as she explored the possibilities of who she could be and how she could act: as a cosmopolitan, an extrovert, confident, outspoken, etc. After she returned to Seoul, she fervently searched for a way to keep reggaetón in her life:

> After I came back to South Korea, I wanted to go to places that played reggaetón, but could not find one. I nagged my friend who was in the know to take me, which is how I got to go to Mike's Cabin for the first time. Since then I call people together and only go to Mike's Cabin when I am in the mood to go out. I go there about once a month. [Sometimes I'm accompanied by] a friend in the Department of English Language and Literature who studied abroad in Mexico and loves reggaetón. Mike's Cabin is the best.[89]

This represents a dramatic change of lifestyle for someone who did not enjoy nightlife at all. Analysis suggests that reggaetón enables her to enact new forms of sociability. Being part of the reggaetón scene reminds her of who she can be in the wake of her time abroad.

The purpose of this section is not to generalize about how reggaetón is consumed by Koreans or those living outside of Americas. Rather, it suggests one of many possible ways in which the genre can be received, interpreted, and appropriated. Nonetheless, the way Minjoo consumes or appropriates reggaetón is by no means an isolated case. An examination of her musical tastes and activities suggests a particular "cultural construction of subjectivity" (DeNora 1999, 54) and "the tensions that exist between the ongoing, identity-in-process at the individual

[89] Ibid.

level and the social and cultural processes that simultaneously enable and constrain identity projects" (Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett 2009, 78). Music as a site of emergent forms of being allows us to imagine ourselves within different cultural narratives (Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett 2009). In brief, music consumption provides a variety of "symbolic resources that people interact with, deliberately or not, to (re)produce their identities" (Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett 2009, 78), and therefore "has the potential to be empowering and liberating" (Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett 2009, 79).

Gender (and Race)

So far, I have discussed how Koreans imagine themselves while enjoying reggaetón. But how do they imagine Others, Latin Americans or Latinxs, through the music? Analyzing YouTube reaction videos and interview data, I suggest that reggaetón music videos reinforce the stereotyped ways in which Koreans perceive Latin America and its people. Gender and race/ethnicity are deeply interrelated in ways in which Koreans perceive such groups. However, I put race in parenthesis in the section title because the racial component is nearly absent in Koreans' conversation about reggaetón. Many Koreans ignorantly lump together the different races and ethnicities of Latin America into one bucket as "Latin" and brown. This discursive homogenization leads to the sexualization of people in and from the region.

In this section I quote anecdotes that exemplify Koreans' stereotypical views of Latin America. I go on to examine how reggaetón music videos hypersexualize Latin American women and subsequently solidify existing stereotypes about them. As mentioned in the methodology section, I utilize three YouTube reaction videos to "Despacito" uploaded by

Korean YouTubers as case studies. I analyze their verbal and non-verbal reactions within the context of Korean culture. I then juxtapose Korean feminist audiences' views with other Korean YouTubers' reactions in order to provide perceptions of reggaetón as regards gender. While the general public's favorable reception of the music videos perpetuates the hyper-sexualization of Latin American women, feminists engage critically with problematic sexual representations and hyper-masculinity in reggaetón.

It seems like the association of Latin America with sexy women is fixed in most Koreans' minds. Here are two anecdotes that concisely reflect this view. In the summer of 2013, I sang in a band and put on a performance at a small concert hall in Hongdae. Since our dress code was red and black, I wore a flattering bodycon dress of an intense red color for the performance. Afterwards, I shared pictures taken during the show with a male friend and his immediate reaction was: "Wow, you look like a Latin American woman." I asked him what he exactly meant by the comment. He said that I looked gorgeous in the picture and it was a compliment. The next anecdote comes from one of my interviewees. We were talking about Koreans' views of Latin America and its people. She remembered: "When I told my friends, including the ones who don't know a lot about Latin America, that I was going [there], they always literally said 'Wow, going to the beach and *nuna-dle*…'." *Nuna* is a Korean word used by males of any age to address a female person older than them. (*-dle* is a plural suffix.) It also expresses intimacy because it is used as an informal nickname. In this context, *nuna* does not necessarily assume age difference, but has connotations of sexual maturity and attractiveness that the speaker admires. The immediate association of Latin America with color red, sexually

attractive bodies, women, and beaches encapsulates Koreans' common preconceptions in this sense.

YouTube Content Analysis of Reggaetón Reaction Videos

For the last few years, Korean YouTubers have been uploading more and more reaction videos to Latin music including reggaetón. They usually react to popular Spanish or Portuguese-language songs, and the majority of them react to the music that their Latin American subscribers request. Although only creators have access to YouTube statistics on demographics, judging from user name and comments it appears that a majority of commentators are from Latin America. The videos are recorded in different languages including Korean, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, although those who post them are not always fluent in Spanish or Portuguese. The titles are usually something like "Koreans React to [Artist – Song]" or "[Artist – Song] Music Video Korean Reaction" and can be written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Interestingly, very few titles are in Korean.

I watched roughly fifty videos with a focus on reggaetón. The ways in which Korean YouTubers react to Latin music videos vary, but is typically of three types: pedagogical, musical, or visual. A pedagogical post is when YouTubers do research beforehand and try to educate viewers by sharing information about particular countries, artists, genres, or languages related to the video. Musical posts comment on melody, voice, diction, lyrics, and related elements. Here, many reference other artists, songs, and genres. Finally, reactions to visual components are the most useful for purposes of this section. Viewers may comment about outfits, body shapes, dance moves, poses, symbols, and the like, which frequently gives rise to the biggest online

responses. Following the criteria mentioned in the methodology section, I analyze both verbal and non-verbal cues discussed in three "Despacito" reaction videos. In so doing, I consider Koreans' gender-specific impressions generated by the images. Based on the patterns observed across the three videos, I maintain that reggaetón solidifies the already-sexualized image of Latin America.

1. DKDKTV

DKDKTV is a YouTube channel run by two Korean guys with the mission of "[d]igging deeper into the Korean Wave."[90] Their "Luis Fonsi – Despacito KOREAN REACTION!" video had had 866,782 views as of 11 April 2019. They record in English and their content largely consists of either introducing Korean life and culture to viewers abroad or reacting to foreign cultural content. I consider their reaction videos truly spontaneous because they said in one video that they do not watch anything before recording in order to provide authentic reactions. The transcription below captures how the Luis Fonsi video recreates and perpetuates age-old stereotypes about Latin America.

(Dancers face-to-face bump their pelvic area against each other)

Danny: What, what was that? I was not expecting that (blushing and waving his hands). Man, just by watching this I feel really humid and hot [flushed] for some reason.

Danny: This was the picture that I always had in mind when I think [of] South America.[91] I see people dancing on the streets, nice beaches, [the] seaside…

David: That girl… that girl…

Danny: Oh yeah, (laughing) that's the most important part.

David: That's the only thing I'm thinking about right now.[92]

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[90] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVEzR8VHu0JC5xlTr53cMwQ/about

[91] In Korean language, "South America" is more frequently used than "Latin America" to refer to the region. Not many people know the difference between the two.

One of the strongest reactions to "Despacito" that all Korean YouTubers expressed is to a specific dance move in which the female and male dancers bump their pelvic areas against each other as shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 captures the reaction that immediately follows the scene in Figure 1.

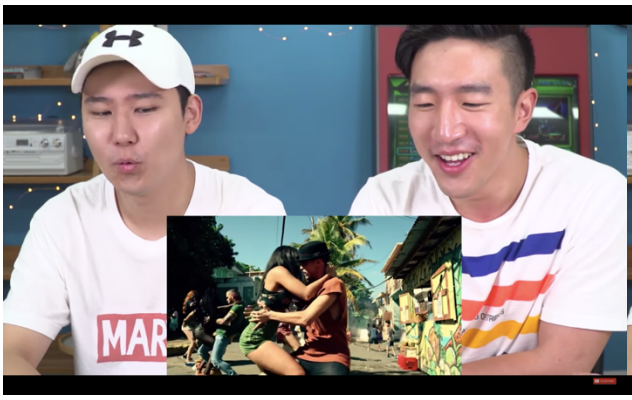

Figure 2. DKDKTV Screenshot 1

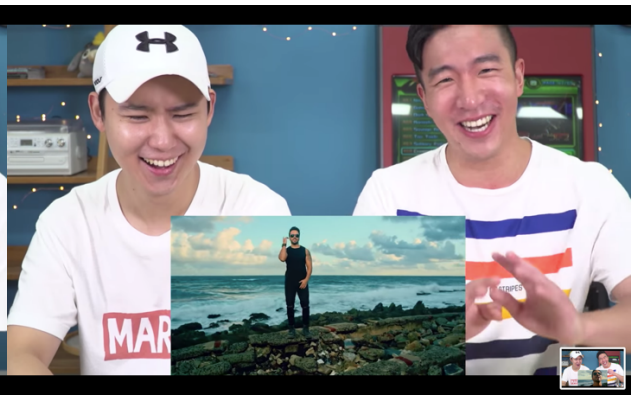

Figure 3. DKDKTV Screenshot 2

Danny (right) uses mostly non-verbal language during this segment of the video. He instantly gets embarrassed by the image, blushes, backs off and starts waving his hands as a sign of denial. He and his friend later comment on the suggestive dance moves that are rare in South Korea. After the viewing, they discuss how the music video confirmed their views of South America: specifically, associations with dancing people, beaches, and gorgeous women. They have no idea where the video was shot, and David guesses: "Argentina? Cuba? Ecuador?" Since these countries are not too different from one another in their minds, their impression of the video informs their perception of an already-homogenized Latin America. The conversation extends into how sexy the girl in the video is,[93] how she inspires them to go to South America, and whether a "Latina girl" might be interested in meeting Korean guys. In this way, the music video

[92] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS-dlQw3Ed4

[93] The female model in "Despacito" music video is Zuleyka Rivera, the Puerto Rican Miss Universe in 2006.

perpetuates longstanding narratives of a romanticized, eroticized, and tropicalized Latin America.

2. ASHanguk & REDC

I chose to analyze the "Despacito" reaction videos of ASHanguk and REDC together because of their commonalities in terms of both verbal and non-verbal reactions. The ASHanguk channel exists "to share how Koreans think about the world and also how foreigners consider Korea."[94] ASHanguk's video "Koreans React to Luis Fonsi 'Despacito' [ASHanguk]" had had 229,860 views as of 11 April 2019. REDC is a relatively smaller channel without an official description of their purpose, but its reaction video "[REDC] 건강한 남미노래 HOT 2곡 리액션 (Luis Fonsi - Despacito / Shakira - Chantaje) Korean MV REACTION" [[REDC] Healthy South American Music Reaction to Two HOT Songs (Luis Fonsi - Despacito / Shakira - Chantaje) Korean MV REACTION] had a total of 454,586 views to date. ASHanguk features two males and one female; REDC features two females and one male in their reaction videos to "Despacito." Below are screenshots and partial transcripts that demonstrate the ways in which Koreans view Latin America or how they project their preconceived ideas of Latin America onto images in the video.

[94] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZYfd94EsqipAuZyunqVBRQ/about

1) ASHanguk

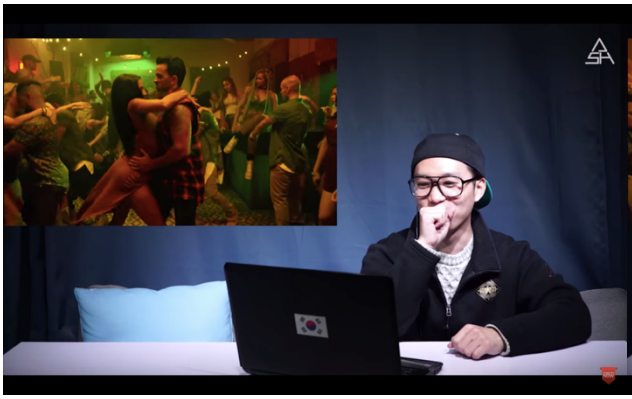

Figure 4. ASHanguk Screenshot 1

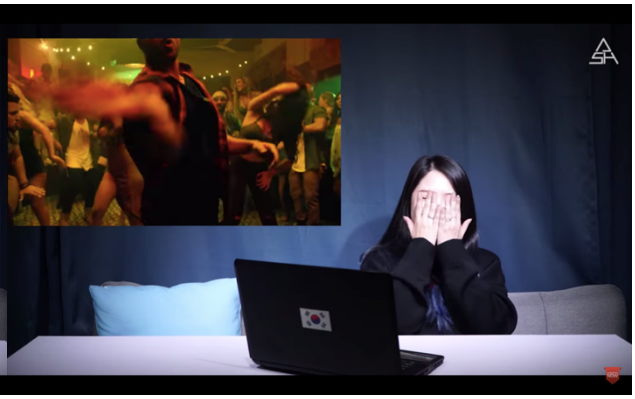

Figure 5. ASHanguk Screenshot 2

A: (Excited) Sexy *unnie* is coming! … Where was this shot? … (Screaming and clapping) Oh yeah, why is this dance so sexy?

C: We have a reaction video to Mexican actresses, and she [Zuleyka Rivera] looks definitely similar to them.

A: (Waving hands to delineate body curves) Isn't this choreography too sexy?

B: I don't know which country it is, but these *nunim-dle* are so desirable (thumbs up).

2) REDC

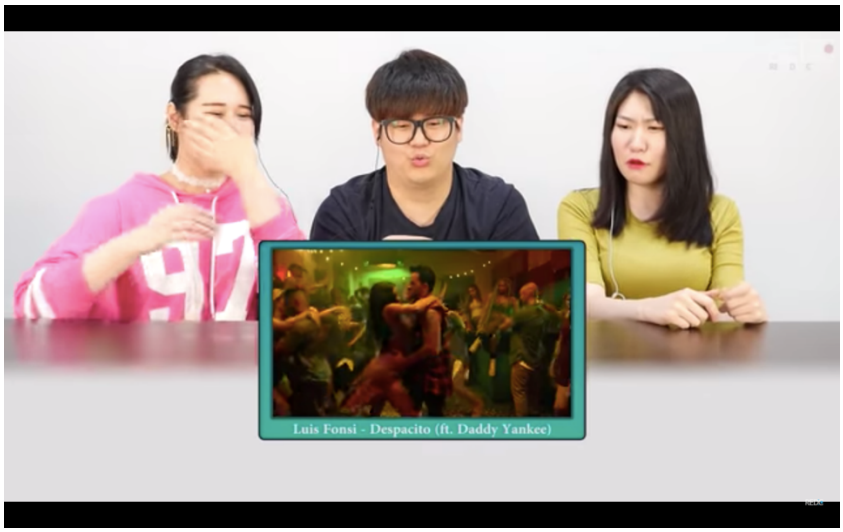

Figure 6. REDC Screenshot

(The music video starts and Zuleyka Rivera appears for the first time)

F: (Oohing and aahing) She's too hot. [It's] certainly South America.

(Dancers face-to-face bump their pelvic area against each other's)

E: It's intense. Indeed, South America should have that strong flavor… (Almost whispering to A) Personally, I hope Daddy Yankee didn't come up on screen anymore.

D: Yeah, I just want to keep seeing the *unnie*.

(Luis Fonsi and Zuleyka dance closely)

D: (Covering her mouth and backing off) Ooh yeah

E: (Pointing at the screen) This scene is the best.

F: This part! This is the highlight! (Frowning and covering her mouth) But if it came out on Korean TV like this…

D: (Firmly) It would be scandalous. It would be rated R. … South American women are really… wow… (biting her lips) sexy.

In terms of verbal language, both transcripts confirm that the Korean words like *unnie* and *nunim-dle* are used with sexual connotations.[95] 'Sexy' and 'desirable' modify *unnie* and *nunim-dle*. Although the transcripts above are incomplete, the vast majority of comments concerned females: how beautiful and curvy they are, what amazing dancers they are, and even how viewers only want to see women without men in the music video. Combined with E's remark— "Indeed, South America should have that strong flavor"—we can infer that the sexualized image of Latin America already existed in the back of Koreans' mind. In a similar vein, the way that many Koreans featured in Latin music reaction videos use the phrase "South American women," suggests that they are all associated with a great body shape, dance, a great butt, and with being passionate, sexy, and attractive.

The importance of non-verbal cues—tone, volume, facial expressions, gestures, posture and the like—in communication is widely recognized. Sometimes non-verbal language constitutes the entire communication in "Despacito" reaction videos because Koreans are often at

[95] *Nunim* has the same usage as *nuna*, but it is normally used with more respect.

a loss for words at the images that they are watching. Non-verbal reactions to videos underscore the state of cultural shock experienced by many viewers. Here I will focus on the non-verbal act of covering one's mouth and eyes with hands. In Korean culture, covering one's mouth when surprised or embarrassed is quite common, and covering the eyes is usually done with a more playful intention of exaggerating one's embarrassment. YouTubers in the reaction videos discussed above covered their mouth ten times and their eyes once. Figures 3, 4, and 5 depict some of these moments. The eleven physical reactions were all prompted by either explicit partner dancing or the female model's voluptuous body shape. The fact that the three viewers in the REDC's video agreed that "Despacito" music video would probably be banned from a Korean public TV network reflects how Koreans generally reject such sensuality. Such cultural difference then leads to the Otherization of Latin America with an emphasis on its sexuality.

Feminist Reactions to Reggaetón Music Videos

While the takeaway from these videos is mostly benign—admiration for sexy bodies and exciting music—some of my feminist interviewees have other opinions. They express a strong dislike for the genre's sexist imagery. I share the perspectives of four female interviewees below and put them in dialogue with existing research on reggaetón and on feminism. Firstly, Jimena voices a repulsion toward the genre's machismo:

> I hate reggaetón music videos. To begin with, they are at odds with my sensibilities, and I just hate it! I am unable to stomach the attitude of the guys who boast their bulked-up bodies in an unbuttoned shirt with arms around *unnie-dle*.[96] I hate myself for getting excited listening to that kind of music and often times I hate the lyrics too, but I do like the cheerful music itself.[97]

[96] *Unnie* is an equivalent word for *nuna*. Females use this word to reference someone of the same sex who is older than them. Here again, the speaker is recognizing sexualized female bodies through adoption of the term.
[97] Jimena. Interview by author. Seoul, July 7, 2018.

Although she was not responding to a specific video, she is aware of their general content as a fervent fan of reggaetón. To begin with, she thinks that reggaetón music videos reinforce Latin American stereotypes too faithfully. She reads their aesthetics as *machista*, even gross, and thus avoids watching them. Nevertheless, the fact that she finds the videos offensive does not seem to affect her musical preferences.

Youngyoon is another fan of reggaetón who does not enjoy the accompanying music videos very much. Her interest in the genre is so strong that she began to subscribe to Apple Music because other Korean music streaming applications do not have a wide range of reggaetón songs.[98] She used to use YouTube to find new reggaetón songs and listen to them, but eventually she switched to a streaming service subscription. Youngyoon said that she still watches music videos frequently:

> I often watch [reggaetón] music videos these days, but there are times that I feel bad watching them because of their sexual objectification of women. Honestly, I don't understand the lyrics unless I really concentrate. Lyrics don't speak to my heart. Also, reggaetón singers are all bluff and bravado. [They are] such an eyesore.

She dislikes the hyper-masculine attitude of male reggaetón singers to the extent that she dismisses them with a joke. She sometimes gets together with her female friends and takes pictures of themselves mimicking reggaetón artists' poses and facial expressions for fun. Making a mockery of the unpleasant masculinity in videos was their way of reversing the male-dominant visual discourse of the genre.

Sonia's remark about reggaetón videos more directly reference Korean feminist culture and language. She is familiar with the genre because she spent about a year in Latin America and

[98] Another interviewee, Yangmcju, also told me that she switched her music streaming app from Genie Music to YouTube Music to enjoy a wider variety of reggaetón. Genie Music is a South Korean music streaming application that is the second most used in South Korea.

two months in Spain. She is actually the one who introduced Minjoo to Mike's Cabin. She says she is not a fan of reggaetón, but she watches music videos on YouTube: "I watch music videos if it's my first time hearing a song or if I particularly like it. I don't watch them if they are *ppaeun* videos."[99] The word *ppaeun* is a Korean slang neologism, an adjective that describes a lack of human rights sensitivity. It originally means "crushed" or "ground" in Korean, but the Internet culture invented a new usage, and people started using it to disparage someone's physical appearance. As South Korea recently went through several instances that provoked feminist movement,[100] *ppaeun* came to be used to belittle people—often Korean men—who are perceived as lacking in intelligence, education, and culture. Considering the origin and usage of the term, Sonia's comment implies that she is well aware of gender-related issues in and criticisms of reggaetón music videos.

Luna is an active and self-identified feminist, and a member of a feminist group in South Korea, Femi Dang-dang.[101] Somewhat ironically, she is an avid fan of reggaetón as well. She has not only learned Spanish since high school and backpacked in Latin America for about 10 months in college but also been practicing Latin dance for years. During our interview, she represented feminist fans' mixed feelings about reggaetón:

> I'm a feminist. Both reggaetón songs and music videos sexualize women from beginning to end and everything about them is sex. I'm not saying that sex is wrong, but I hate the lyrics so much because they describe women as doing *servicio* (service) to men. There are too many descriptions of [female] waists or hips. I hate it, but still listen to reggaetón

[99] Sonia. Interview by author. Seoul, July 6, 2018.

[100] In 2015, a South Korean radical feminist online community called "Megalia" was born. The website's mission is to promote women's rights and remove misogyny prevalent in the Korean society. In 2016, a 34-year-old man brutally stabbed a 23-year-old woman to death in a public restroom in Gangnam, Seoul. He confessed, "I did it because women have always ignored me" (Park, Park, and Lee 2016). The misogyny hate crime provoked a nation-wide feminist movement with the hashtag #survived.

[101] *Dang* in Korean means a political party. A few like-minded people established Femi Dang-dang out of a pity that no political party presented a policy on feminism issues during 2016 South Korean legislative election. (https://www.facebook.com/events/513694088836873/permalink/517022535170695/)

> because it is exciting. Although I try not to consume it as much as possible, I have to listen to it from time to time when I really want to. It's easy to ignore lyrics because it's in Spanish. … I intentionally search for female reggaetón artists but end up not listening to them because I don't find their music particularly good.[102]

As a feminist activist, she is conscious of the political implication of consuming the music. Her feminist consciousness makes her feel guilty for liking reggaetón, but I saw how excited (and accordingly frustrated at the same time) she got while talking about reggaetón.

As illustrated through the four cases described above, Korean feminist reggaetón fans feel a deep discomfort over the music's hyper-sexualization and/or degradation of women, its hyper-masculinity, and its sexism. Such perspectives align with broader criticism the genre has been subject to since its creation. There have been attempts to censor the music in Puerto Rico and Cuba for its obscenity and vulgarity, as mentioned (Negrón-Muntaner and Rivera 2007; Rivera-Rideau 2015; Tremlett 2012). Samponaro (2009) argues that reggaetón artists "routinely celebrate a virulent masculinity" (498) and incorporate subjects of homophobia and sexism. Nonetheless, there have also been attempts to subvert the male-dominant narratives associated with the music. For instance, the Spanish reggaetón movement led by young women realizes its feminist potential (Araüna, Tortajada, and Figueras-Maz 2019). Admittedly, reggaetón is still a niche music in South Korea; the language barrier and lack of encounters with the genre do not make it as controversial as in Spanish-speaking countries. Nevertheless, we have observed the use of parody on the part of Korean audiences (particularly women) as a way to respond to the genre's normative hyper-masculine representations.

The content analysis of YouTube reaction videos and the interviews with Korean feminist audiences reveal different ways in which reggaetón is perceived in South Korea. Based on the

[102] Luna. Interview by author. Seoul, July 6, 2018.

reaction videos I watched, YouTubers generally display "positive" reactions, manifest through surprise, admiration, or curiosity. On the other hand, personal interviews with feminist fans disclose more critical viewpoints. This gap might stem from the feminist interviewees' stronger interest in and familiarity with the genre, their real-life experiences, and their educational backgrounds (all of the four interviewees have studied or traveled in Spanish-speaking countries and graduated from Seoul National University, considered the best university in South Korea). Regardless of their reactions, it is obvious that Korean audiences view Latin America as gendered and sexualized. While the sexualization of "South American women" or "Latinas" is part of how Koreans perceive their Latin Others, the music contributes to such perceptions by enhancing and solidifying the imagery.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this project, I have examined reggaetón meanings and implications in South Korea. In Chapter 2, I showed how multiple globalizing forces have facilitated the introduction and development of a Latin music scene in the country. I traced this phenomenon back to the Korean War to offer a historical perspective, and documentation of presence of music with Latin roots in the Korean peninsula for many decades. I then reproduced the stories of some current stakeholders of Seoul's reggaetón scene based on participant observation and interviews. Between the two time periods analyzed—the mid-20th century and the 21st century—I found parallels in the expression of multi-leveled forms of globalization. Both periods are associated with macro-level hegemonic globalizing forces. Western music entered into the non-Western musicscape through 1) American military garrisons, a manifestation of American hegemony; and 2) American corporate media outlets represented by streaming services such as Apple Music.[103] While the medium has changed, the hierarchical structure of globalization remains the same.

Interestingly, however, musical flows have also allowed for the emergence of "counter-hegemonic globalization." Latin music made its way into Korea largely through the individual efforts of Latinx and Latin American soldiers, as well as young Korean/Latinx cosmopolitans. It is doubtful that these individuals intentionally utilized the resources of the U.S. to challenge contemporary views of globalization as defined by contemporary scholars (Evans 2012; Santos 2013). However, the manner in which they brought Latin music (including reggaetón) to South Korea demonstrates individual agency. Latinx and Latin American soldiers brought instruments

[103] Spotify is the most popular music streaming service in the world, but it is not available in South Korea yet. As of the first half of 2018, Spotify has 36% of music streaming subscribers worldwide followed by Apple music which has 19% of the market share (Statista 2018).

and CDs to South Korea in the past. More recently, both Korean and Latinx students, travelers, and workers share their experiences with the cultures of Latin America thanks to the ease of global travel and growing exchange between the two regions.

Latin music in South Korea has served as a space for encounter, socialization, and community building amongst members of the Korean diaspora, Latin American/Latinx immigrants, and Korean nationals. Using Mike's Cabin as an example, I explained how reggaetón has been leveraged as a space for communication, mutual understanding, and intercultural learning. It provides an opportunity to socialize with people that would have been difficult to approach outside of the club. People that gather around reggaetón music and dance in Seoul are cosmopolitans open to the exchange of cultures, ideas, and lifestyles. Mike's Cabin is also where Latinxs feel home in South Korea and where Koreans find a unique and liberal cultural space that feels far from home. Korean and Latinx cosmopolitans together create, vitalize, and maintain places like this. That is why physical contact and real-life community experience continue to be the most important elements in developing reggaetón scenes, no matter how much the genre will be sonically distributed through digital media.

Chapter 3 focused on the unique intersections engendered by the encounter of reggaetón with South Korea in terms of class, identity, and gender. In South Korea, the music takes on new meanings and implications specific to that location. Above all, the difficulty most listeners have in understanding the lyrics has resulted in a very specific audience for such repertoire. Spanish-language education is one of the major ways that Koreans are exposed to reggaetón. Although learning Spanish has become more popular in recent years, an international cultural immersion experience is only available to a small segment of the population able to afford it. The fact that

Spanish is typically learned after one or more other foreign languages makes it even more of a luxury. However, since few Koreans understand lyrics in Spanish, sounds of reggaetón are exempt from public denunciation and the classist criticism seen in Spanish-speaking countries. Reggaetón has come far from *la música del barrio* (the music from the hood) in Asia: its recent audience expansion is not only geographical but also affluent.

Drawing on Marketing Theory and Music Psychology literature, I explored how Koreans interpret and appropriate reggaetón as they manage their self-identity and personal habits. In light of music's potential to empower and liberate, I introduced Minjoo as a case study. Reggaetón has accompanied her transformations from a shy Korean girl to a confident woman and an avid aficionado of reggaetón. The music has facilitated this change, beginning in Spain where her journey began to South Korea where it continues in a different sociocultural reality.

Through analyzing YouTube "Despacito" reaction videos and feminist interviewees' opinions, I reviewed the varied reception of the genre by Korean audiences. Whether they are received critically or not, the music videos appear to reinforce Latin American stereotypes. In addition to their hyper-sexualization of women, the fact that a lot of Koreans are ignorant of the region and its culture exoticizes Latin America through its media portrayals.

I would like to close these reflections with the quote that opened the paper: "Changing social relations are acted out on the dance floor" (Fairley 2009, 290-291). My exploratory research is an attempt to grasp various aspects of the emerging reggaetón scene in South Korea, thereby explaining what has driven this phenomenon and how it reflects or stimulates social changes. Despite the growing visible cultural exchanges between Asia and Latin America (with or without the U.S. as a cultural mediator), not enough of what is happening in terms of musical

activity is being discussed or documented. By examining musical encounters and their implications more seriously, we will be able to learn more about the music and people in both regions.

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